Blood for Blood

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Blood for Blood

by HANNIBRAT (moderndaylestat)

Summary

18-year old Hannibal Lecter is the heir of the most powerful family in Italy. Led by his uncle Robertus, the Lecter family maintains a spotless and highly-respected public image, while profiting off the criminal underworld. But even with all the wealth and influence, Hannibal can't get what he desires most - retribution against those who wronged him. Until he meets Will Graham, the only man that can help him.

Hannibal is determined to get Will, the henchman of the family, to teach him the skills of his very specific trade. However, Will is reluctant to mentor someone like Hannibal (rich, spoiled, would weep at the first sight of blood). Hannibal proves him wrong.

After a lot of unrelenting persuasion on Hannibal's part, they enter a mentor-protégé relationship. Other kinds of relationships follow down the track.

Notes

Hello! This fic idea has been stuck in my head for several months now, and although I know nothing about mafia and organized crime, I decided to give this story a go. Hannibal and Will's reversed ages is also a dynamic I haven't written before, but I'm excited to play around with it and see where it goes. Enjoy! ♥

See the end of the work for more notes

The Consigliere

For most people in Italy, turning 18 means being legally allowed to drink, smoke, and drive. For Hannibal Lecter, turning 18 means becoming officially indoctrinated into the Lecter family business.

His Uncle Robertus and Aunt Murasaki don't have children of their own, making Hannibal the heir of his generation. As such, he is expected to assume leadership of the family affairs once his uncle is too old to govern. And being one of the most influential and wealthy families in Italy, there is a lot to learn when it comes to managing the constantly-expanding assets and dealings of the Lecter clan.

Hannibal's busy schedule is set to become even busier now that he will be required to attend business meetings with Uncle Robertus and get to know all their associates. Between this, medical school, and his musical and artistic hobbies, he will barely have any time for himself.

But that doesn't matter, because Hannibal is *thrilled*.

He's been waiting for this day for the past 8 years, ever since he was taken in by his aunt and uncle after the terrible tragedy that claimed his parents and little sister. And now, Hannibal's patience has finally paid off. The magical eighteen is like a spell unlocking the door between him and his most potent desire; the single most important thing Hannibal has been craving all his adolescent life.

He looks at himself in the mirror as he finishes getting dressed to attend his first business meeting. Sophistication and class are qualities the Lecters are known for, which has an impact on everything they do, down to how they dress for regular meetings. The figure staring back at Hannibal through the mirror is that of a young man, clad in a plain but elegant beige suit, coupled with a pale brick-orange tie.

If it were Hannibal's world, he would've chosen a suit with more colours or patterns. He is mindful, however, that such extravagant attire may make him look like he's deliberately drawing attention to himself, unduly exaggerating his importance.

It's rude to appear arrogant.

Hence, Hannibal settled for a more subtle suit with neutral colours. It's by no means a bad look on him; the suit is bespoke, much like every other piece of formalwear for everyone in his family. Just another thing the Lecters are known for.

Hannibal examines his appearance once more, this time focused on the details. He's lean but not overly muscular, tall but not towering. His blond hair has been combed and parted to perfection, and there is just the right amount of poise and pride shining through his amber-coloured eyes. Satisfied with how he looks, Hannibal heads from the living quarters of the family estate to the part where Uncle Robertus's office is.

Without a doubt, there are specific things that Uncle Robertus wants him to learn at his first meeting; but today, Hannibal has his own agenda.

Each honoured associate of the Lecter family has their designated place at the long table in Uncle Robertus's office, with him sitting at the head of it. Hannibal's assigned seat is towards the other end. This suggests that the seating plan follows the order of importance, with the most valued business partners being closest to Robertus, the leader. Although Hannibal is related to his uncle directly by blood, his place as the protege is at the less important end of the table.

For now.

Uncle Robertus raises his index finger from where his hands are resting on top of the table. It's a small movement, no more than an inch, but everyone immediately falls silent and gives him their undisputed respect and attention. This kind of authoritative aura is what Hannibal hopes to achieve one day; having the entire room obey the slightest whims of his fingertips.

"My most esteemed ladies and gentlemen, today I would like to introduce to you my nephew, Hannibal," Uncle Robertus announces. "As of his eighteenth birthday last week, he is now officially a member of our organization."

There is a round of applause and birthday wishes, after which the guests stand up to shake Hannibal's hand, one by one. Upon learning their names and what they do, Hannibal files the knowledge into his expansive memory. Most of it will be useful to remember for the future, but right now, it's hardly relevant to what Hannibal wants.

Antony Dimmond, family lawyer. Giovanni Sogliato, financial manager. Abigail Hobbs, political representative...

Not quite what he needs.

Tobias Budge, bodyguard. Garrett Jacob Hobbs, Abigail's father, arms dealer...

Possibly what he needs.

Will Graham, the consigliere.

Probably not what he needs, judging by the job title alone at least. However, Hannibal feels that he's heard the man's name before, and not just in the context of being Uncle Robertus's right-hand man and main advisor.

Hannibal gives Signor Graham a few more seconds of his attention. The man is a couple of inches taller than Hannibal, and looks to be just on the cusp of 30. He's carrying just the right amount of muscles around his bones for a pleasantly toned look. A navy blue tailor-made suit, a pearly white shirt, and a grey silk tie have been carefully chosen to further accentuate the lithe shape of his body.

Signor Graham's brown curls have been pushed back, and his facial hair flawlessly trimmed and shaped, adding to his overall sharp and debonair appearance. All in all, it's nothing that

would make him stand out from the rest of the guests at the table, as they're all dressed and groomed to their absolute best efforts.

But upon having his eyes linger over Signor Graham for a little longer, Hannibal starts to see it.

Agile and attentive eyes. Immaculate hand-eye coordination. Perfect posture enabling precise and deliberate movements. Excellent awareness and control of every muscle in his body, and the strength they possess. All qualities of a man who has undertaken decades of thorough training in weaponry and combat.

A killing machine disguised as a man in an expensive suit.

Hannibal, who has been training in martial arts for years himself, can recognise a fellow fighter when he sees one. And with that recognition, he feels his heart rate pick up with excitement.

He blinks, pulling himself back into the present moment. As his eyes focus on what's in front of him, he realises he's been staring right into Signor Graham's eyes for the past minute. The man returns the stare without wavering and regards him with a slight quirk of an eyebrow.

Hannibal averts his gaze, a blush of embarrassment colouring his cheeks. *It's rude to stare*.

He collects himself in no time, though — *never let them see your confidence waver, Hannibal* — and keeps his focus on Uncle Robertus for the rest of the meeting, memorising everything the man says.

Over the years of living with his aunt and uncle, Hannibal has picked up a few things about the *business* . He knows that his family has associates in almost every major societal institution of Italy, and even some abroad. Uncle Robertus's men are everywhere; in law enforcement, politics, economics, and trade. And of course, in a few other areas too, but those are only ever mentioned behind the closed doors of Uncle Robertus's office.

Before now, Hannibal has only seen glimpses of how powerful his family is, mostly through the limitless money and prestige they're surrounded with. But as he listens to the conversations at the table, he truly begins to understand how easily the Lecters can influence the workings of the entire country. Uncle Robertus could probably orchestrate a revolution with another little movement of his index finger, if he so wished.

That kind of power is *intoxicating*. And Hannibal knows that he will have it all, in due time. Right now, however, he mustn't lose track of his own unfinished business that he's come here for.

"The money we invested in the product three months ago is yielding quadruple profit, sir," says the man that looks after the family's finances, Signor Sogliato. The way he is craning his long thin neck toward Uncle Robertus, hungry for approval, makes Hannibal think of a turtle that's straining to grab a bite of something that's far out of its reach. "I would advise you to invest more, before the stock prices rise again."

Uncle Robertus tilts his head, considering the idea. His eyes trail to his right, to Signor Graham; a silent request for a second opinion. Signor Graham's gaze snaps up from his hands that have been idly twirling a small object.

If Hannibal weren't tactful, he would almost assume that Signor Graham wasn't listening. That he looked bored. But of course, Hannibal would never dare assume such things about the person that is sitting *directly next to* Uncle Robertus.

"I hear they've started to really crack down on it at the borders," Signor Graham points out.

The movement of his fingers pauses momentarily, allowing Hannibal to take a better look at the item he's been playing with.

A fishing lure, consisting of a sharp hook and a bundle of shiny feathers. The peculiar object pulls at a thread in Hannibal's memory, pointing towards a specific place in his memory palace.

Uncle Robertus turns to speak to a man sitting at the lower-ranking end of the table, whom Hannibal vaguely remembers as being one of the capos. "Tell your men to take care of it. Then we'll proceed with acquiring more product."

Several heads nod, all in favour of whatever the big boss decides.

After a few more minutes of talking, Uncle Robertus announces the meeting finished, and the guests start to trickle out of the room. Hannibal catches a glimpse of the navy blue suit disappearing into the foyer. He immediately gets to his feet and follows.

If what he's about to do is going to have unpleasant consequences, it's better to have made the mistake on his first day compared to later down the track.

His eyes seek out Signor Graham in the banquet room, adjacent to Uncle Robertus's office, where an assortment of light refreshments has been prepared by the Lecters' servants. Uncle Robertus insists on serving Caprese skewers every time, much to Hannibal's displeasure. While the cherry tomatoes, mozzarella and basil fit together as ingredients, the overall taste is still too plain and uninteresting for Hannibal's refined palate.

With a small sigh, he pushes his disapproval of the food aside, to focus on the more important task at hand. He takes a deep breath, remembering everything his aunt has taught him about how to be a Lecter. *Keep your back straight, and your head held high. Walk unhurriedly but with purpose.*

"Excuse me, Signor Graham?"

The older man turns around, eyebrows rising slightly when he realises it's the second time within one hour that he's come eye to eye with Hannibal.

"Signor Lecter," he acknowledges Hannibal with a polite nod.

Although it's a simple formality, there is something about being addressed by his title and last name that gives Hannibal a little boost of confidence.

“May I ask you something?”

Signor Graham takes a swig out of his tumbler of whiskey. Considering the fact that champagne is the only alcohol being served in the room, and that the contents of the man’s glass smell exactly like the top-brand whiskey from Uncle Robertus’s personal cabinet, Signor Graham is a man with special privileges. Which means that he’s not only respected, but *valued* by Uncle Robertus.

“Of course.”

Under the bright lights of the chandelier in the banquet room, Hannibal gets a better look at Signor Graham. The man’s features look more sleek and elegant than what Hannibal could notice at first glance. More handsome. Though, despite his delicate bone structure, the man exudes an air of iron-clad power and control. Like there’s a beast hiding beneath that stubbled skin, dormant for now, but ready to strike any moment.

Signor Graham doesn’t look like he’s in a rush to leave, but Hannibal still feels a twinge of hesitation before he speaks. He would hate to waste the older man’s time with his request. Or rather, would hate for Signor Graham to see it as a waste of time — whereas Hannibal considers what he is about to ask to be a matter of life and death.

More specifically, a matter of significant improvement to Hannibal’s life at the expense of someone else’s death.

Certain people have an outstanding debt to pay to his family. And it’s Hannibal’s personal mission to ensure that debt is paid in full; an eye for an eye, blood for blood.

“What is it exactly that you do for Uncle Robertus?”

Signor Graham’s eyebrows rise further at the question. Hannibal holds his breath.

“I’m the consigliere, like I said before. Your uncle’s right hand man. I help him deal with matters of high importance.”

Like I said before. Hannibal tenses up, realising that he’s just made the man repeat what he had already told Hannibal during the meeting. Not only does that make *Hannibal* look like the one that didn’t pay attention, but it also makes him look stupid.

However, Signor Graham doesn’t sound annoyed. Not even mildly inconvenienced. Hannibal exhales softly and decides to persevere.

“Of course, sir. But I couldn’t help but notice that there is something else,” he replies delicately. Careful not to dismiss what the older man said in fear of offending him. “There’s been people who have attempted to wrong the family, I’ve heard about them.”

Hannibal pauses then, unsure how to proceed. Unsure if he’s supposed to know what he knows.

Signor Graham hums with a slight nod of his head. “There *were* people who disrespected your uncle, yes. But those people *are no more*.”

He’s dipping his toes into the topic but not fully broaching the blood-stained waters. Hannibal shifts his weight from one foot to another and re-squares his shoulders. To get what he wants, he needs to be explicit.

“I’ve heard that some of them have been found dead, with a fishing lure stuck through their lip.”

Hannibal drives the rest of his message home by training his eyes onto Signor Graham’s hand, the one that toyed with the fishing lure during the meeting.

The older man chuckles, sharp like the clink of the ice cubes at the bottom of his whiskey glass. “You’re a quick learner, Signor Lecter. A real asset to the family.”

Hannibal lets out another breath he didn’t realise he was holding, this time in relief. Like he thought, Signor Graham is definitely the man he is after.

“I want to learn from you, Signor Graham.”

“I'm sure your uncle is going to teach you everything you need,” the older man responds with a dismissive half-shrug. His eyes are on Chiyoh, their maid, who is approaching them with a tray of appetizers.

Signor Graham’s hand moves determinedly past the atrocious Caprese skewers and instead snatches a canape with smoked salmon and caviar. A man with taste, Hannibal concludes. *A carnivore*.

Even more of a reason for Hannibal to persist.

“No, I want to learn *your kind of trade.”*

Signor Graham licks his lips clean of caviar oil, giving Hannibal a display of his teeth. Hannibal finds himself thinking that those canines and incisors are worthy of tasting something that’s higher caliber than animal meat.

“I don't teach,” Signor Graham says, eyes now back on Hannibal. “I execute.”

Hannibal’s tongue darts over his own teeth, as if it’s got a mind of its own. “I will compensate generously for your time, I assure you.”

There are many things the Lecter family will never have a shortage of, and money is one of them. And due to Hannibal’s responsible nature and good self-restraint, Uncle Robertus and Aunt Murasaki have been allowing him to have his own, unsupervised funds for years. Perfect for hiring a tutor to help Hannibal with his personal business, without alerting the rest of his family.

However, upon hearing the offer, the blue in Signor Graham’s eyes flares, like a flame sparking into life on a gas stove. And Hannibal is well enough versed in chemistry to know that blue flame always burns hotter than the regular orange.

“If you think you can sway me with your money, you clearly don’t yet understand what loyalty means in this family.”

The pitch of Signor Graham’s voice has dropped into the dangerous octave, but Hannibal refuses to back down. Even under the threat of blazing flames.

“Allow me to rephrase, sir. I can compensate in other ways.”

Hannibal can’t instantly think of what a man like Signor Graham might want or need, but he knows that whatever it is, it can be obtained with relative ease. With generations’ worth of wealth at Hannibal’s disposal, everything else, even the most unreasonable requests, will fall into place with a snap of his fingers.

“Oh, I see how it is,” Signor Graham drawls, scanning Hannibal from head to toe with an evaluative gaze. The blue fire of his eyes reduces down to a warm singe, almost like a caress. A caress running up and down Hannibal’s body, and leaving him with a burning sensation in his groin.

“Intelligence isn’t the only asset of yours that you’ve been flaunting, is it?” the man continues, clicking his tongue. “What would your uncle say?”

Oh.

The heat pooling in Hannibal’s lower region surges up to paint his cheeks red.

“It’s not— That’s not what I meant!” he stammers, growing more flustered with every passing second.

Embarrassment and shame cloud Hannibal’s vision and make his head tingle. But beneath that, a more potent emotion raises its head. Disbelief, bordering on ire. How dare the man think that Hannibal is *propositioning* him?

Hannibal crosses his arms and opens his mouth to wipe out Signor Graham’s misconception once and for all. Only to be interrupted by that familiar sound of ice cubes clackering against glass. The sound of Signor Graham laughing.

Utterly unperturbed by Hannibal’s stare, the man downs the rest of his drink and sets the empty tumbler on the table.

“Buonanotte, Signor Lecter.”

After sparing Hannibal a final glance and a little amused smile, Signor Graham heads to the door and delves into the black and starless mouth of the night.

The Hands-on Approach

Chapter Summary

> “I don’t swing that way, Signor Lecter. Find yourself another teacher.”
>
> Beneath the lovely aroma of hot coffee saturating the room, Hannibal’s sensitive nose picks up another smell. It’s just a slight spike in hormones, the tiniest change in the natural scent of Signor Graham’s body, but it’s enough to clearly tell Hannibal that the man definitely — *definitely* — swings that way.

Chapter Notes

> In case anyone likes to visualise outfits, this is what Will is wearing in this chapter!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

> “Good morning, Franklyn,” Hannibal greets, opening the passenger side door and sliding into the seat.
>
> Franklyn, the family chauffeur, regards him with a warm expression. “Good morning, Signor Lecter.”
>
> As soon as Hannibal has buckled himself in, the charcoal-black and spotless Bentley Arnage starts rolling away from the Lecter estate. Perfectly punctual, to ensure that Hannibal would arrive at his weekly martial arts lesson with Sensei Du Maurier on time.
>
> Hannibal lets out a good-natured huff and seeks out the other man’s eyes. “Franklyn, please, continue to call me Hannibal.”
>
> Even though Hannibal turning 18 means most people will now address him by “Signor Lecter” instead of the juvenile “Hannibal”, he wants his relationship with Franklyn to remain unchanged.
>
> Franklyn’s smile widens. “If you say so.”
>
> “I insist.” Hannibal gives him a smile of his own. “You’re still driving me to school and extracurriculars, so nothing’s changed. The only new thing is that I have a seat at Uncle Robert’s table now.”
>
> Hannibal doesn’t need to look at the other man to know that the mention of Uncle Robert’s table has captured his interest. Franklyn is a curious man, bordering on nosy; always hungry

for a chance to hear the juicy secrets of the obscenely rich people that employ him. Unfortunately for Franklyn, there is only so much he can learn when his job consists of nothing but driving said people around all day. Besides, most of his passengers aren't as talkative as he would like. They know to keep sensitive details of the family business to themselves.

Whereas Hannibal, who doesn't have as much to hide, *not yet*, is willing to chat with Franklyn every time they ride together.

At this point in time, he guesses that Franklyn knows more than him about the family affairs, simply because the man has been around longer. He must have seen glimpses of things here and there, heard snippets of conversations, and been able to put two and two together to form some kind of an understanding about the way the Lecters handle their business, and what the business entails exactly.

And Hannibal is going to pull out those precious pieces of information out of Franklyn the way a talented fisherman pulls fish from the sea.

"I bet there was a lot to learn. I mean, at your uncle's meeting," Franklyn says.

Tell me everything about it is what Franklyn doesn't say, but it's written all over his features.

"There was. I met a lot of very interesting people," Hannibal muses. "But I'm sure you know them all already, since you've been with the family for almost as long as I've been alive."

The way to a man's heart is through his stomach, but the way to Franklyn's head is through stroking his sense of loyalty and importance.

Franklyn preens, like an obscenely large peacock ruffling its feathers. He replies with something along the lines of "It's my pleasure", but Hannibal is already moving onto the next part of his strategic conversation.

"You've met Signor Graham, right?" he asks, keeping his voice appropriately casual.

"You mean Graham Junior? As in Will Graham, the son of William Graham Senior?" Franklyn quickly scans their surroundings with his eyes before leaning towards Hannibal in a conspiratory manner. It's almost comical, considering that they are alone in an enclosed vehicle. "Keep this between us but Graham Senior used to stink up my car with those huge cigars every time I drove him places. Thank god his son doesn't smoke."

Hannibal gives a sympathetic nod. He couldn't care less about hearing more complaints regarding Signor Graham Senior's poor etiquette, but it's a small price to pay to keep Franklyn talking. Amidst all the unimportant chatter lie crumbs of important information.

It sounds like the partnership between the Lecter and Graham families spans multiple generations. It explains why Signor Graham is so esteemed in Uncle Robertus's eyes, despite being one of the youngest members at the business meeting apart from Hannibal himself.

“I can only assume that Will Graham’s father passed their family’s craft to him, the same way Uncle Robertus will pass his to me,” Hannibal says in an offhand tone, as if he’s thinking out loud.

He downplays his interest in the topic further by looking out the window, idly watching houses and trees fly by.

“He sure did.”

Since Will Graham’s lifelong occupation was set in stone the moment he was born, he must have started his training very young. By now, he must speak violence as his native language and handle weapons like natural extensions of his hand. Hannibal shudders imagining what it would be like to see that kind of power. To learn from that kind of power.

“It must’ve been a while since Signor Graham took the place of his father. Because I don’t remember ever meeting Signor Graham Senior.”

“Yeah, you would’ve been very little.” Franklyn’s brow furrows as he exercises his memory. “It’s got to be at least a decade ago now.”

A *decade*. Ten years. Which means that Signor Graham was there to see what happened to the Lecter family eight years ago. If he was there to see the most horrible day of Hannibal’s life, he would remember it. And if he remembered, he would understand why Hannibal must do what he’s going to do.

In Hannibal’s eyes, no man could be a more perfect mentor than Signor Graham.

And as such, Hannibal is going to continue to pursue him, despite the very inappropriately suggestive note their last encounter ended on. Perhaps even, *because* of the inappropriately suggestive note. Something about the way Signor Graham looked at Hannibal implied that he didn’t bring up the younger man’s *assets* for nothing.

The car comes to a stop in front of Sensei Du Maurier’s *dojo*, an ornate Japanese-style building where Hannibal takes his karate lessons. Pleased to see that he no longer has to continue the conversation, Hannibal bids goodbye to Franklyn and promptly exits the Bentley.

***

He doesn’t see Signor Graham until the next business meeting. And even then, he doesn’t pay the man any special attention. Hannibal gives him the same short but polite greeting he gives every other business associate in attendance, pretending the conversation they had last time didn’t happen. He doesn’t want to scare the big fish away before the pursuit truly begins.

Once everyone is back in the banquet room after the meeting, gorging themselves on the subpar Caprese skewers, Hannibal drops his lure into the waters.

As the meeting took place in the morning this time, Uncle Robertus has decided to serve coffee instead of champagne. A large espresso machine has been wheeled into the room on a gold-plated cart, and dear Chiyoh is working tirelessly behind it to ensure that each guest gets their caffeinated beverage made fresh and exactly to their taste.

As Hannibal predicted, Signor Graham can't resist the aromatic smell of freshly-ground beans and joins the small crowd that has gathered in front of the espresso machine. Hannibal can't help but shoot a quick glance at Chiyoh. They'd been close since Chiyoh joined the family as Aunt Murasaki's maid, and their friendship is what allowed Hannibal to approach her before catering began, to ask for a small favour.

He lingers near the cart, pretending to be studying the various canapes laid out on the table beside it. Chiyoh does her part with flawless ease; when it's Signor Graham's turn to order his coffee, she apologises profusely and explains that the portafilter needs urgent cleaning and that his drink shouldn't be delayed by more than a few minutes.

Hannibal identifies his cue immediately, and slides up to Signor Graham, leaning in so much that it borders on breaching the older man's personal space. Because that is exactly the point.

"You know, Signor Graham, when I said that I *wasn't* offering my assets…" Hannibal says, speaking in a hushed and discreet fashion, loud enough for only them two to hear, "...I may have meant that I am."

Signor Graham stills for a moment, eyes firmly on the back of the espresso machine. Without a doubt, contemplating whether to lash out at such a direct and indecently salacious proposition, or keep the beast shackled for now. Then, he turns to Hannibal, looking him right in the eyes.

"I don't swing that way, Signor Lecter. Find yourself another teacher."

Beneath the lovely aroma of hot coffee saturating the room, Hannibal's sensitive nose picks up another smell. It's just a slight spike in hormones, the tiniest change in the natural scent of Signor Graham's body, but it's enough to clearly tell Hannibal that the man definitely — *definitely* — swings that way.

Hannibal allows a small but satisfied smile to creep onto his face. "I didn't think a man of your caliber would be *ashamed of what gets him going*."

Hook, line, and sinker.

Lightning strikes across Signor Graham's bright blue-green eyes. The way he moves, fast and abrupt, should be easily noticeable in the middle of a crowded room. Should be, but *isn't,* because an expert like Signor Graham is just as good at being unnoticeable as he is at being deadly. Hannibal finds his wrist caught in the man's tight grip and his arm twisted behind his back at an uncomfortable angle.

He sucks in a shocked breath, angling his head to shoot a surprised glance at Signor Graham. Before he gets a chance to do so, the older man propels him forward with a subtle but assertive nudge, and Hannibal's feet start moving along without conscious choice.

It all happens excruciatingly slow and unbelievably fast at the same time. Signor Graham maneuvers him past all the people and into the quiet hallway with bone-chilling calmness. His body is a solid press against Hannibal's backside, and Hannibal's tortuously bent arm is trapped between them, making it impossible for him to get away. Blood surges to Hannibal's face, drenching him in a flush that feels like embarrassment and fear. And something else.

Something that Hannibal knows he shouldn't feel in a situation like this. But the paradoxicality of it makes even more heat pool in his lower abdomen, dangerously near his crotch.

Signor Graham doesn't loosen the vice-like hold on Hannibal's wrist until they've reached a secluded little nook underneath a large staircase. As soon as he can, Hannibal twists out of the grip and puts as much distance as he can between himself and the other man. As he does so, he comes to a painful realisation that he's backed himself into the corner, surrounded by two walls and Signor Graham's looming shape.

Hannibal bites back a snarl, that of a cornered animal. "Touch me again and I will —"

A precisely-aimed kick to the back of Hannibal's knees causes his legs to give out. He's knocked off balance and lands with his knees hitting the floor, right in front of Signor Graham.

The sheer weight of humiliation that's brought by the position Hannibal finds himself in renders him completely speechless. The blush on his face has reached the level where his ears feel like they're on fire. Signor Graham only smirks at his predicament. *The bastard.* He steps closer but makes no more attempts to touch Hannibal.

"You will what? Run crying to your uncle?" His tone is chiding, bordering on a sneer. "He would *thank* me for taking out the time to teach a brat like you some manners."

Hannibal grits his teeth and glares daggers into Signor Graham. The man didn't exactly hurt him, not physically, but Hannibal's pride feels largely wounded. His plan to bait Signor Graham backfired catastrophically. He was caught and escorted out like a misbehaving child, into a place that bears an awful lot of resemblance to a time-out corner.

Anger simmers just beneath Hannibal's skin, directed equally at Signor Graham and himself. He feels furious at himself because, despite having a brown belt in karate and being otherwise well-versed in martial arts, he *allowed* himself to be manhandled in such a humiliating and disciplinary way. And the rest of his fury is addressed to Signor Graham, for daring to subject Hannibal to such an unnecessarily crude, hands-on approach.

The thing is, Hannibal could strike back. He could leap to his feet and deliver a punch that would smash Signor Graham's head into the stairwell, giving him a decent injury if not a full concussion. Hannibal is skilled enough at hand-to-hand combat that he knows he could do it.

But one of the things that distinguish an experienced fighter from an amateur is being able to know not only *how* to use his power, but *when* to use his power. Retaliating right now and assaulting the man that his family holds in such high regard wouldn't be a wise move. Not something Hannibal could get away with. Not now. So, he stays put and weighs his options.

He's still in front of Signor Graham, *on his knees.* The position is extremely counterproductive to all rational thinking, since Signor Graham's crotch occupies most of Hannibal's visual field. The man is wearing a long and thick coat that's been buttoned up, successfully obstructing the region between his legs. As such, Hannibal can't visually confirm what he was able to smell back at the banquet room.

He doesn't yet know if that's a blessing or a curse.

"All I did was ask if you would mentor me," Hannibal points out, the pitch of his voice far more controlled now that he's had a little while to calm himself down.

Signor Graham takes another step forward, and Hannibal has to tilt his head back to maintain eye contact. And to get his face away from the man's groin. In light of such a change in posture, Hannibal's brain helpfully supplies that not only is he still on his knees, but he's looking up at the older man like an obedient pet begging for a treat.

A curse. Definitely a curse.

"You insinuated things you shouldn't have," Signor Graham scolds, the timbre of his voice akin to a low growl.

Hannibal opens his mouth, ready to quip back that it was fully Signor Graham's fault that Hannibal's innocent enquiry was derailed and turned into a trainwreck of poorly received sexual innuendos.

Before Hannibal can speak, however, he hears sounds of talking and laughter right around the corner. Someone is promptly approaching the place they're hiding in. And if they don't do anything about it, those people will soon discover boss Lecter's nephew in a rather compromising position.

Hannibal flees.

He springs up from the floor and dashes through the tight space between Signor Graham and the wall before the man has the chance to stop him. Hannibal doesn't stop or look over his shoulder until he's back in the banquet room, safely tucked away into the middle of the crowd he doesn't care about and the Caprese skewers he doesn't like.

Only then does he catch his breath. He spends a few minutes just getting his heart rate under control and regathering his bearings. Then, he makes sure to show his face around and mingle with a few guests to cover his tracks, as if he'd never left the room. It takes Hannibal around half an hour of nibbling on the food and having boring conversations before he gathers the courage to scan the room for Signor Graham.

Hannibal is somewhat surprised to find that the man hasn't made it back to the room. Whatever his reason, it certainly has nothing to do with giving Hannibal some space. Signor Graham may be polite, by necessity if nothing else, but he is not *kind*.

Signor Graham is a deviant, a sadist, and a killer. Not because it's what his father taught him to be, but because he *wants* to be.

And as much as the little preview of the man's violent tendencies has put Hannibal on edge, it also excites him. Signor Graham is both the game to be played and the prize to be won. The poorly restrained monster in him that's straining to break free every chance it gets only raises the stakes. And the higher the stakes, the better the payout.

So, Hannibal goes all-in.

It's obvious that he can't beat Signor Graham with violence. Not when the man has decades of experience and a pile of dead bodies under his belt. Meanwhile Hannibal is yet to stain his hands with outright cold-blooded murder, so to speak. Pulling the plug on the patients during his hospital placement just to watch life fade away from their eyes doesn't count — most of them were as good as dead to begin with.

It's easy to get away with things like that. Mostly because no one would expect such cruelty from Hannibal Lecter, the top student in his class and a promising young doctor. Hannibal Lecter is the very embodiment of kindness, virtuosity and propriety. He's young and humble. Conscientious and mild-mannered. Respectful to his elders. Loyal to his studies. Passionate about innocent hobbies like art, music and cooking. The perfect student, perfect nephew, perfect face of his noble family.

Nobody would expect a boy so modest and respectable to have a flair for the lewd and scandalous.

Hannibal considers himself someone who has standards, but being at the peak age for youthful passion and having an equal preference of men and women, he certainly didn't graduate high school a virgin. He's had his share of experimenting between the sheets, as well as more adventurous escapades in semi-public places, all before turning 18.

Sex is fun and satisfying, but it is also a tool. Hannibal knows that if used the right way, it can elicit various things from people, such as trust, information, or aid. More specifically, it can be used to elicit a specific favour from a specific man.

Violence isn't the only kind of influence Hannibal is capable of, and Signor Graham is going to discover it first hand.

Chapter End Notes

Feedback is what keeps me motivated so if you're enjoying this fic please let me know. And if there's anything in particular you'd like to see happen in this story, put it in the comments as well!

The Teeth

Chapter Summary

> “Before we were interrupted, I believe I was on my knees,” Hannibal tells the man, opening his eyes wide and lowering his chin. The epitome of all things suggestive.
>
> Signor Graham takes a step towards Hannibal. “What makes you think I have time for your nonsense?”
>
> A little too much emphasis on the last word. Perhaps out of the need to convince himself, more than convince Hannibal, that he isn’t interested in having this conversation.
>
> Hannibal gears his voice into a low murmur. Smooth, persuasive, and sultry. “It’s late, and I don’t imagine you have much else planned for tonight. Perfect time for a nightcap.”

Chapter Notes

> I'm back with another chapter! This one is a bit longer than usual. Hannibal gets more closely acquainted with Will ;)
>
> For those who are interested, this pic was the inspiration behind Will's outfit in the post-meeting scene!

Hannibal doesn’t always mean to use the plight of others to his advantage. Sometimes it just happens. One of those times is today, when an incidental conversation with his aunt and uncle at lunch spins Hannibal gold.

From the moment Uncle Robertus enters the dining room, it is blatantly obvious that he is in a foul mood. Hannibal can already smell a potent stench of liquor on the man, and it’s only lunchtime.

“Something is bothering you, uncle,” Hannibal notes as they sit down to eat.

Uncle Robertus sighs and rubs his temples with the thumb and middle finger of his hand. He looks like he’s aged 5 years overnight. His ash-blond hair has a more pronounced grey tinge, and several more wrinkles have formed on his forehead. Even his high and pointy

cheekbones — the signature trait in the family, which Hannibal has also been lucky to inherit — suddenly look deflated.

“Trouble with the business,” Uncle Robertus tells him.

At this point, Hannibal would normally drop the topic, since work matters are for grown-ups. Now, however, he is one of said grown-ups and part of the business, so he figures it wouldn’t be inappropriate to enquire further.

Hannibal stirs the French onion soup in his bowl as he speaks, in an attempt not to look overly nosy. “What kind of trouble?”

As a force of habit, the older man prepares to dismiss Hannibal with a wave of his hand, undoubtedly ready to tell him not to worry and leave it for the adults to handle. But then, Uncle Robertus pauses, giving Aunt Murasaki a contemplative look. She smiles and nods, and Uncle Robertus turns back to Hannibal.

“Upon checking the books last night, I noticed that things don’t quite add up,” the man explains. “Someone has been stealing money from the family.”

Hannibal’s spoon scrapes the bottom of his bowl with a little too much force, emitting a small screeching sound. He meets his uncle’s eyes with shock and distaste written all over his face.

Judging by how much of a headache this discovery is giving Uncle Robertus, the matter is more serious than some obtuse novice at the bottom of the hierarchy trying to pocket some cash. If that was the case, Hannibal’s uncle would have simply ordered one of the capos to deal with it. No, it seems that the problem lies within their inner circle; someone at Uncle Robertus’s table is a traitor.

Hannibal purses his lips and glances at Aunt Murasaki, then back to his uncle. The concern on their faces indicates that this hasn’t happened before.

“If there is anything I can do to help find who did it, tell me,” Hannibal says, his voice strong with conviction.

Leadership and responsibility have always come naturally to him, especially when it comes to stepping up to help his family. Aunt Murasaki gives him a warm smile, and Hannibal feels that warmth deep in his chest, filling him with reassurance that she is proud of him.

“Thank you, Hannibal. For now, all you need to do is keep this information to yourself,” Aunt Murasaki says after another spoonful of the steaming soup.

The contents of Uncle Robertus’s bowl remain untouched so far, a testament to just how much the theft is bothering him.

“I’ve called Will in this evening, we are going to discuss how to proceed,” he informs Hannibal.

Will. The man’s name has a lovely ring to it, rolling off the tongue akin to good whiskey. Hannibal finds himself wanting to try saying it too, now. To spell the name out with his lips

and see what it tastes like on his tongue.

“Of course. I will keep an eye out and tell you if I see anything suspicious,” he tells his aunt and uncle.

As much as Hannibal is appalled by the problem that has befallen his family, the scheming opportunist in him preens at the circumstances. The situation presents an invaluable opportunity for what he has in mind. Signor Graham is due to arrive at the Lecter estate for a private meeting with Uncle Robertus in a few hours, which will give Hannibal a chance to catch the man for a little one-on-one rendezvous.

Perfect.

***

A collection of Beethoven’s piano sonatas can be heard from behind the closed door of Uncle Robertus’s study. Hannibal believes that his uncle plays music in the background not only because he likes it, but also to drown out the sounds of talking during the private meetings.

Hannibal has heard little whispers about what happens to the people who betray the family. As such, he has no doubts that once this money thief is caught, Signor Graham will personally ensure that they face a slow and torturous death. It makes perfect sense that the details of such gruesome executions are kept on the down-low, known only to Uncle Robertus and his right-hand man.

Hannibal lurks in the shadows of the empty banquet room adjacent to Uncle Robertus’s office waiting for his target to emerge, like a hunter waiting to pounce onto his prey. He hears the office door open and Signor Graham’s footsteps move into the hallway. The man’s signature goodbye, the low-timbred and melodic “*Buonanotte*”, rings through the quiet space.

Not a second later, Signor Graham passes the banquet room. That is when Hannibal steps out of his hiding place.

“Signor Graham! Good evening.”

The man is dressed in less formal clothes this time, corresponding to the less formal nature of his meeting with Uncle Robertus. There is a long brown coat — unbuttoned, to Hannibal’s delight — darker brown pants, and a pitch-black button-up shirt with no tie. His hair is brushed but not gelled back, so the voluminous and airy curls on top of his head bounce with every step he takes. Hannibal finds himself thinking that the casual attire makes the man look even more handsome than usual.

Upon hearing Hannibal’s voice, Signor Graham turns on his heels. Slowly, like the calm before the storm.

“Evening, Signor Lecter.” His tone is measured and polite, but the look in his eyes jabs Hannibal with a loud and clear ‘*What the fuck do you want?’*

Hannibal’s posture doesn’t waver. “I’d like to pick up where we left off.”

Signor Graham regards him with a tired and irritated look. If in Hannibal’s eyes, he saw himself as a fearless hunter staking out a rival predator, then in the older man’s eyes, Hannibal is nothing but an annoying mosquito, not worth his time. If Signor Graham could get him to shut up with one well-aimed swat, he would.

Hannibal doesn’t back down, even under the looming metaphorical slap. Compared to the beast that is Will Graham, he may be a minuscule insect. But that’s just fine, because mosquitoes have a taste for blood, too.

“Before we were interrupted, I believe I was on my knees,” Hannibal tells the other man, opening his eyes wide and lowering his chin. The epitome of all things *suggestive*.

Signor Graham takes a step towards Hannibal. “What makes you think I have time for your *nonsense*?”

A little too much emphasis on the last word. Perhaps out of the need to convince himself, more than convince Hannibal, that he isn’t interested in having this conversation.

Hannibal gears his voice into a low murmur. Smooth, persuasive, and sultry.

“It’s late, and I don’t imagine you have much else planned for tonight. Perfect time for a nightcap.”

He rolls his shoulder, tilting it towards the open door of the secluded and dark banquet room. The music flowing from Uncle Robertus’s office into the hallway is great for concealing the sounds of talking, but also for concealing the sounds of other things.

Signor Graham’s eyes narrow. He shoots a quick glance to both directions of the hallway to make sure they’re alone, and crosses the threshold of the room with a few quick and imposing strides. Hannibal’s feet have to shuffle backwards in a haste succession in order to avoid colliding with the older man.

He can tell Signor Graham’s hand is itching. Itching to swat the mosquito away, or to even deliver a full backhanded blow to Hannibal’s cheek for his indecent propositions. Instead of striking, however, the man focuses on ensuring the double doors separating the room from the hallway are locked. Whereas Hannibal, staying true to his promise, sinks to his knees.

When Signor Graham turns back around to face him, his eyes are pure cool indifference. It speaks of years, if not decades, of practice shielding his true feelings from others, so that they don’t show through any part of his body language. But while Hannibal admires the meticulous construction of the man’s demeanour, he sees it for exactly what it is: a facade.

“What part of ‘I’m not interested’ do you not understand?” Signor Graham’s voice is practically a growl.

Hannibal can recognise a subtle foreign twang in it that wasn't there whenever the man was calm and unaffected. American, perhaps? Hannibal's ministrations have caused a crack in the facade, and now he can see the riot inside. The agitation, the heat, and the *want*. And if he wasn't already able to read Signor Graham's state off the slight cues in his voice, then the sizable bulge in the man's pants makes it blatantly obvious.

"The part where you're clearly lying about it," Hannibal answers, awfully brazen. Perhaps even too brazen for his own good. He ends the sentence with a placating "Sir."

Signor Graham is on him in an instance, a quick hand gripping either side of his chin with bruising force. Hannibal winces in surprise and tries to pull back. The hand holds him firmly in place, like an iron shackle.

"Give me one reason not to knock your teeth out right now." The older man's tone is just as scathing as the furious look in his eyes.

Despite the increasing twinges of pain in his jawbone, Hannibal allows himself a small coy smile. This is the perfect opening he's been waiting for.

"No need for that, Sir. I know how to keep my teeth out of the way."

Slowly, as if handling something unpredictable and dangerous — because he *is* — Hannibal's hands slide up the sides of Signor Graham's legs, stopping at the waistband of his pants. The older man doesn't stop him, or try to knock his teeth out for that matter, so Hannibal continues with his act. Using all of his willpower to stop his fingers from shaking with both nerves and excitement, he undoes the button and slides down the zipper.

Another bat of Hannibal's eyelashes against his pale cheek. Another deliberately demure glance up at the man's face. Hannibal's words are more of an exhale than a sound.

"Let me show you."

The look in Signor Graham's eyes is still stern, but his body starts to drop its tightly-controlled posture. The man leans his backside against the wall, removing his hand from Hannibal's chin. His legs part just the tiniest amount, and it doesn't go unnoticed by Hannibal, who always pays attention to little details. It's as good of an invitation to continue as any.

He doesn't expect any kind of verbal permission or encouragement from Signor Graham. There is absolutely no way the man would risk appearing *needy*. And when Hannibal thinks about it, the fact that Signor Graham hasn't grabbed him by the hair and dragged him to his uncle's office to be shamed and disciplined, already indicates the man isn't opposed to what is about to happen.

Hannibal swallows down a lump of nervousness that's threatening to form in his throat. He's given head once or twice before, but never to someone much older and with much more power over him. The power to ruin Hannibal's reputation if he doesn't do a good enough job. Or worse, to deem Hannibal's performance not persuasive enough to agree to mentor him.

Hannibal flexes his fingers against Signor Graham's hips and forces his performance anxiety to stay down. He shoots the man another teasing glance, licks his lips, and brings one hand to cup the outline of Signor Graham's cock. He can feel the heat through the thin fabric, can see the bulge grow underneath his palm, and can smell the spiced scent of the man's desire.

When he squeezes the bulge a little bit firmer, Signor Graham lets out a sharp inhale. Empowered by the wordless encouragement, Hannibal slides his fingers under the waistband of the black underwear, ready to pull it down.

Two hands grip his shoulders and push him back with so much force that Hannibal has to detach his hands to stop himself from falling backwards on the floor. As soon as their bodies are no longer touching, Signor Graham moves away, fast like a bullet. Before Hannibal's brain can process what just happened, the older man is already prying the doors of the room open.

An eyeblink later, he disappears down the hallway without giving Hannibal so much as an explanation, or even a brief look, for his unexpected departure.

Hannibal stares, mouth agape and eyes incredulous, still on his knees. By the time his brain is ready to form sentences again, the man is long gone.

***

Usually, when Hannibal visits the Uffizi Gallery, he occupies the seat right in front of *La Primavera*. That way, he can see every little detail of the painting and replicate them as precisely as possible in his sketch. Today, however, he takes a seat at the back of the room, intending to look at people looking at the painting.

It's Saturday afternoon, so the gallery is busy with visitors. It's mainly tourists, as usual, but Hannibal spots a few familiar faces too. Much like him, they are devoted art lovers, enchanted by the tranquil and soul-nurturing atmosphere of the gallery to the point of coming back every chance they get.

One familiar face stands out to Hannibal in particular. It belongs to a man he has met before, but not in the context of art galleries. It's not a surprise to see Signor Sogliato at the Uffizi, Hannibal supposes. His high societal status and position as the financial manager of the Lecter family means that he is likely to be an appreciator of all things luxurious and artistic.

Hannibal puts his pencil down, preparing to approach the man. Aunt Murasaki has always emphasised that it's good form to say hello when running into a business associate in public. And impeccable manners is a quality the Lecters live by. Besides, Hannibal would love to talk to someone about the art and more specifically, impress that someone with his extensive knowledge of *La Primavera* and other Botticelli's pieces. The fact that Signor Sogliato works for Uncle Robertus is the cherry on top; building rapport with the man will help Hannibal

establish himself as a respectable and worthy heir in the eyes of other business associates, too.

It doesn't look like Signor Sogliato has noticed Hannibal yet. His eyes are bouncing from one person to another in a quick succession, as if he's searching for someone specific. Hannibal picks up his pencil again. If the man is expecting to meet someone, then he shouldn't interrupt. He can always strike up a conversation with Signor Sogliato about their mutual love of art later, after one of their regular business meetings.

Hannibal returns his focus to the sketch. Today he wants to draw La Primavera not from up close but from a distance, so that he can include the crowds of people admiring it into the picture. After a few minutes, Hannibal seeks out Signor Sogliato with his eyes again, if only out of casual curiosity.

Signor Sogliato has found the person he was looking for and they're exchanging a few words, but neither man's body language looks particularly relaxed. A colleague perhaps, Hannibal theorizes. Signor Sogliato hands his unnamed companion the slim black suitcase he's been carrying, which gives more substance to Hannibal's theory. The other man nods, shakes Signor Sogliato's hand, and briskly walks out of the room.

Hannibal shrugs and goes to lower his gaze back to his drawing, but then, out of the corner of his eye, he catches Signor Sogliato staring right at him. Hannibal's mouth instinctively assumes a friendly but professional smile; the epitome of perfect manners.

Signor Sogliato doesn't smile in return.

The way his body stiffens is visible to Hannibal even across the room. The man looks at Hannibal with the shock of someone who wasn't expecting to be recognized. But more prominently than that, with the guilt of someone who's been caught doing what he wasn't supposed to.

Hannibal's breath hitches. The pen wavers in his grasp and produces an ugly misplaced stroke across the page. Suddenly, he knows exactly what was in that suitcase.

***

The next day, Hannibal is perched on the low stony wall-fence that separates the main driveway of the Lecter estate from the garden occupying the left side of the property. The wall is only a couple of feet tall and wide enough to comfortably sit on, and it offers a lovely view of the mansion his family calls home. There is a work-in-progress rendition of that same mansion on the open page of Hannibal's sketchpad.

It's approaching noon, which is an unfavorable time for drawing since the sun rays are shining straight down and making the lighting harsh and overexposed. Hannibal doesn't mind, though. Drawing is a pretence; he is here to *think*, alone and uninterrupted.

Signor Sogliato is the filthy rodent stealing money from the family. No, not *Signor* Sogliato, just Sogliato — the heinous traitor doesn't deserve the honorary title in Hannibal's eyes.

Hannibal's first instinct was to go straight to Uncle Robertus and tell him what he saw. However, since it's such a bold accusation, his uncle would undoubtedly ask for proof. Proof that Hannibal doesn't have. His allegation is based on one fleeting sighting of Sogliato in the gallery and the accompanying hunch that the deal he witnessed involved the stolen funds. But Uncle Robertus would need more than a *hunch*.

If Hannibal spoke now, he would only damage his own reputation, while the esteemed finance manager who has been with the family for years would get away with his misdeeds. Hannibal gnaws on his lip. Revealing his cards to Sogliato now would be the equivalent of handing him all the power. No, he needs to play the long game.

A hand placed on Hannibal's lower back makes him almost jump out of his skin.

He leaps to his feet, sketchbook and pencil falling on the ground, and finds himself faced with… not Sogliato's looming shape, not Sogliato's freakishly round and chill-inducing eyes, and not Sogliato's evilly-grimacing teeth.

Hannibal finds himself faced with Signor Graham.

"Come with me," the older man says.

His voice is perfectly calm but there is an edge to it, sharp like a blade, offering no room for disobedience. An order framed as a suggestion.

The hand resettles on the back of Hannibal's waist, and Signor Graham stalls just long enough to pick up the dropped pencil and sketchbook, before beginning to steer Hannibal towards the mansion. *Don't leave any evidence behind,* Hannibal's mind supplies regarding the items Signor Graham picked up, and his heart rate speeds up at the notion.

Hannibal wants to ask what is happening, but he figures out he will find out soon enough. Guided by the firm press of Signor Graham's hand on his back, his feet move along the path and towards the side entrance of the Lecter mansion. *Not the main entrance, to avoid attracting attention.*

Is Signor Graham Sogliato's ally? Are they both in on the money scheme? Hannibal shivers. It can't be. The thought of Uncle Robertus's consigliere, his most loyal confidant, conspiring behind his back makes Hannibal nauseous. *It can't be.* He suddenly wishes he hadn't dropped the pencil. It isn't overly sharp but can cause considerable damage if aimed in the right spot.

Once they've entered the building, Signor Graham ushers Hannibal towards the bathroom a few steps down the hallway. He locks the bathroom door but doesn't switch on the lights.

Hannibal waits, breath stilled in his lungs.

"Well?" Signor Graham prompts, notes of impatience permeating his tone.

It's dark so Hannibal can't see much else than varying shades of black. However, the proximity of the older man's voice and the smell of his cologne tell Hannibal that Signor Graham is standing right in front of him.

"I'm afraid I don't follow, Sir."

"You started something last time you saw me. Finish it."

Hannibal lets out a relieved breath; this has nothing to do with Sogliato.

Signor Graham pushes him down to his knees with two heavy hands on his shoulders, and Hannibal goes willingly. Perhaps more enthusiastically than warranted, even, but that's because he's simply glad he doesn't have to deal with the missing money situation just yet. In fact, Signor Graham may be just the person to stop Hannibal from worrying about the theft altogether. Even if only for a moment.

Still, amidst everything that's going on, Hannibal doesn't lose sight of the mission he's been itching to complete ever since the dreadful day he lost his parents and sister. This mission is exactly why he's determined to get Signor Graham to mentor him.

"Only if you agree to train me in your trade," he tells the older man.

Signor Graham responds with an ambiguous hum. "You're not going to convince me unless you put your mouth to better use."

Hannibal figures this is as good of a deal as he can get. His deft fingers find the older man's crotch and go straight to stripping away the layers of clothing.

He doesn't know why their encounter in the banquet room ended so abruptly, and would've spent the next eternity thinking about it if not for the shocking discovery regarding Sogliato, which stole all of his focus. It wasn't that Signor Graham fled because they were about to be interrupted. It also wasn't because he had to attend to something that couldn't wait. The only other explanation Hannibal can think of is that Signor Graham didn't *want* Hannibal's mouth on his cock.

But that would be utterly untrue.

Of course the man wants it. The way his body is practically aching for Hannibal's touch is impossible to misinterpret. And as Hannibal feels rough and calloused fingers tangle into his hair to bring his face closer, he knows that Signor Graham is most definitely interested in becoming closely acquainted with his lovely mouth.

So, Hannibal doesn't waste any more time and gives it to him.

He pulls Signor Graham's pants and briefs down to his knees and licks a slow stripe from his pelvis to the tip of his cock. Once there, Hannibal envelops his lips around the thick shaft. Although he feels little swirls of self-consciousness at the bottom of his stomach, the all-encompassing darkness makes it easier somehow. It means Hannibal can't get distracted by

Signor Graham's piercing glacier-blue eyes. Or deterred by the sharp glint in them that his nervous mind might perceive as dissatisfaction.

However, the low and lustful groans that spill from Signor Graham's lips sound like anything but dissatisfaction. Hannibal's anxiety eases, and he twists his fingers into the bunched-up folds of the man's pristine khaki-coloured slacks. He slowly bobs his head up and down, and the hand in his hair makes massaging motions against his scalp, indicating approval.

Heat starts to pool in Hannibal's lower abdomen, putting pressure into the front part of his pants. The principle he always follows in the bedroom is putting his partner's pleasure before his own, and this time is no exception. Hannibal makes sure not to disrupt the movement of his mouth on Signor Graham's cock as his hand trails down to undo the zip closure of his jeans. Before he notices, he's rutting against the older man's leg.

"That's it, just like that," he hears Signor Graham's breathy voice tell him.

The fingers move down to stroke the nape of his neck, and Hannibal can't help but preen at the praise. He sucks in a deep breath and takes the man's cock as far into his mouth as it can go, the head of it hitting the back of his throat. The urge to gag and cough is strong, but the urge to please is *even stronger*.

The sounds coming from Signor Graham's mouth grow louder and more frenzied, his usual poised demeanour replaced with poorly-muffled moans, sweet profanities, and earnest praise. It's the last one that makes Hannibal's arousal spike, to the point where he has to reluctantly stop rubbing his crotch against Signor Graham's shin, so that he doesn't stain the man's pant leg with his release too early. Being the greedy hedonist that he is, Hannibal wants to prolong his own pleasure as much as he can.

The slight tremble in Signor Graham's thighs grows more prominent, and the hand in Hannibal's hair tightens. Next moment, salty and warm liquid floods Hannibal's tongue. He does his best to swallow it all, and then licks and sucks on the head, savouring the aftertaste. Only after Signor Graham releases his hair and pulls out, Hannibal's focus shifts back to his own neglected erection.

He resumes the rutting motion, determined to reach his peak now that he's sated his partner. The older man's hand moves from the back of his head to grip his chin, way more gentle than the other day. His thumb brushes Hannibal's jaw, swiping across his lips.

"What a needy thing you are."

He brings his leg forward, encouraging Hannibal to come from nothing but rubbing himself against it. As much as Hannibal would like to, he doesn't think he can accomplish it without the aid of his hand. Unless…

"How did I do, Sir?" he asks in his best innocent yet seductive voice.

"Good. Very good."

Hannibal bites his lip. His hips are moving so fast, and his orgasm seems so close, yet just out of his reach.

“Good enough that you’d have me again?”

Although he can’t see Signor Graham’s face, something tells him that the man’s mouth stretches into a knowing smirk. He’s figured out exactly what Hannibal needs.

“Yes. You’re a good boy, Hannibal,” he murmurs, approving. “So good to me.”

The words work like a magical switch. Euphoria rises and then finally falls over the precipice. A whole-body shudder possesses Hannibal, making his toes curl and his breath stutter. He comes so hard that there is absolutely no doubt both the crotch area of his jeans and Signor Graham’s pant leg are now soiled beyond no return. And Hannibal, who’s usually so obsessed with cleanliness and order, doesn’t have a care in the world.

He gets on his feet, steadying himself by placing his hands on Signor Graham’s flanks, and wipes his mouth with the back of his hand. The need to see the deeply-sated look in the older man’s eyes as well as his own debased appearance is overwhelming, so Hannibal reaches for the lightswitch.

They both blink at the sudden assault to their eyes. Signor Graham’s pants are stained and wrinkled, and the grey blazer he’s wearing is now askew. Hannibal’s outfit consisting of a red sweater and light blue tailor-made jeans isn’t faring any better. Nor is his hair, which has been messed up into a profound disarray by Signor Graham’s hand.

Hannibal meets the man’s eyes, suddenly unsure of what to say. He resorts to staying quiet and zipping his jeans back up instead. Signor Graham makes a half-hearted attempt at fixing his clothes and once he’s done, he unlocks the door and peeks outside. Hannibal follows him out, scanning their surroundings for servants, or worse, his aunt or uncle. Luckily, the hallway is empty.

After a few steps, Hannibal stops.

“My sketchbook?” he prompts the man expectantly.

The book itself is inexpensive and easily replaceable, but the countless sketches of *La Primavera* in it are not. There is one page in particular that Hannibal wouldn’t like anyone getting their hands onto; a page where he’s redrawn a segment of the painting as an arrangement composed of real human bodies.

“Left it in the bathroom,” Signor Graham tells him.

Hannibal turns back, only to hear the man continue walking in the opposite direction, towards the side door they initially came in through.

“Good day, Hannibal.”

The words are followed by the sound of the door closing, not giving Hannibal a chance to reply. Maybe it’s for the best, because he can feel a pink flush coating his cheeks in response

to being called by his first name. It looks like they're getting along after all. Hannibal smiles to himself, pleased that he's slowly but surely getting closer to accomplishing his mission.

And then, the realization that he forgot something very important crashes over him like a wave. He resists cursing out loud and smacking the heel of his hand into his forehead.

He forgot to ask Signor Graham when his first lesson will be.

The Fire and the Fury

Chapter Summary

> “I need to ask you something,” Hannibal begins once he’s successfully fallen into step with the older man.
>
> “Yes?”
>
> “When will my first lesson be?”
>
> The glance Signor Graham gives him is brief, the bare minimum of what is considered polite. “When the sun rises in the West.”
>
> Hannibal takes a moment to process the words but when they sink in, his jaw drops in disbelief.

Chapter Notes

> Hannibal's plan to make Will his mentor seems to be running into an obstacle after an obstacle, testing his patience and commitment. Meanwhile, the money thief approaches Hannibal directly.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The morning is cold, and Hannibal’s thin dress shirt doesn’t do much to protect him from the chilling wind. He gives in to a shiver but continues to linger close to the driveway of the Lecter estate, waiting patiently. He watches expensive cars roll into a stop one by one, bringing Uncle Robertus’s business associates to yet another meeting.

So far, none of the vehicles Hannibal has observed are the one he’s after. He supposes that there is no reason for Signor Graham to arrive exceptionally early. Unlike many others, the man doesn’t need to utilise the pre-meeting mingling time to suck up to Uncle Robertus in order to climb up the ranks. This means that Hannibal will have no 10 minutes at most between Signor Graham’s arrival and the meeting starting to ask his questions. Fortunately, a few minutes is all he needs; he just wants to enquire as to when his training will begin.

He imagines his first lesson with Signor Graham. In this idealized fantasy, Hannibal has found hard proof of Sogliato’s treachery and has decided to make a stellar first impression on his mentor. He would drag the shaking and whimpering Sogliato into the room, presenting him as the sacrificial lamb to appease Signor Graham’s godlike power.

Because this is a daydream set in a perfect world, Signor Graham would let Hannibal kill and display Sogliato according to *his design*. And oh, what a display it would be. As an avid fan of symbolism, Hannibal would use the concept of greed as the main inspiration for his grotesque art piece. He'd dress Sogliato's lifeless body in yellow clothing, and maybe even paint his skin gold. There would be piles of shining golden coins surrounding the tableau, to represent how the man's never-ending hunger for money ended up being the very thing that killed him.

As a finishing touch, Hannibal would thread a fishing lure through Sogliato's bottom lip, to symbolize Signor Graham's influence and approval regarding the display. Such an addition would let everyone know that the two of them have joined forces, interlacing their bloodstained hands to create a union so powerful that nothing and no one could defeat it. A reassurance of protection and prosperity to their allies, and a promise of unforgiving cruelty to their enemies.

It's beautiful.

A silver Cadillac pulls up into the driveway, drawing Hannibal out of his blood-tinged reverie. Signor Graham bids goodbye to his chauffeur, a broad man with dark hair and skin, and gets out of the car.

"Good evening, Signor Graham," Hannibal greets.

"Evening, Signor Lecter." The man's eyebrows rise in slight amusement. "I'm starting to suspect you are stalking me."

Hannibal offers him a polite smile — not confirming nor denying anything. Signor Graham doesn't seem to care either way, and starts walking briskly towards the mansion. Hannibal has to awkwardly dash after him to keep up.

"I need to ask you something," Hannibal begins once he's successfully fallen into step with the older man.

"Yes?"

"When will my first lesson be?"

Signor Graham brushes his cedar-brown curls out of his face with a sharp movement of his hand, coupled with an annoyed grunt. Hannibal can't tell if the annoyance is directed at the windy weather messing up the styling of his hair, or at Hannibal approaching him. He hopes it's the former.

The glance Signor Graham gives him is brief, the bare minimum of what is considered polite. "When the sun rises in the West."

Hannibal takes a moment to process the words but when they sink in, his jaw drops in disbelief.

“Excuse me?” he asks, offering Signor Graham the benefit of the doubt, although deep inside, he knows it’s useless.

“You heard me.”

“I thought we had an agreement.”

Signor Graham doesn’t spare him another glance.

“I don’t recall agreeing to anything. You kept pestering me with your *advances* , so I gave you what you wanted. There’s nothing more to it.”

Irritation ignites in Hannibal, like kindling catching fire from a lit match. Does Signor Graham think this is a joke? Hannibal narrows his eyes, and his hands that are resting by his sides ball into fists.

“I told you I’d only do it if you agreed to be my —”

“I didn’t *promise* you anything in return, and you went for it anyway.” Signor Graham finally turns to look at Hannibal again, his face infuriatingly neutral but his eyes a cool shade of condescending. “If you don’t want to be treated like a charity with an open mouth, then make your terms clear before you start.”

The words feel like a slap in the face. The shock, the incredulity, and the *sheer audacity* of Signor Graham render Hannibal immobile, making him stop in his tracks. The small flame of irritation inside him turns into wildfire in the blink of an eye, spreading from his chest cavity into every cell of his body.

As much as Hannibal lives by respect and politeness, it quickly becomes apparent that those qualities aren’t going to get him anywhere when it comes to Signor Graham. Hannibal catches up to the other man with a few long strides, then swiftly moves past him and comes to an abrupt stop in right front of him. They’re taking a shortcut path between one of the buildings and a fence, and the passage is so narrow that Hannibal’s frame is enough to completely block Signor Graham’s way.

“What is your problem with me?”

Hannibal’s eyes are ablaze, shooting scalding-hot daggers at the older man, enough to make him go up in flames.

“I don’t have a problem with you.” Signor Graham’s demeanour is cool indifference to Hannibal’s burning fury.

He takes an imposing step forward, but Hannibal doesn’t budge.

“Then why won’t you train me?” he demands.

“You really want to know, huh?”

Hannibal squares his shoulders, resolute. Signor Graham takes another step, right into his personal space. He inclines his head, as if assessing the younger man's worth. Hannibal has to tilt his head back in order to keep staring into his eyes, but it's better than looking away.

The eye contact can only be described as bone-chillingly *invasive*. It feels like an icepick being poked through Hannibal's eye socket into his brain, and Signor Graham digging out every one of his thoughts and feelings in a makeshift lobotomy. It seems like the man can see into every corner of Hannibal's mind, dissecting the grey matter all the way down to the place where Hannibal keeps his darkest desires.

Hannibal immediately averts his eyes in an attempt to shield himself, but it's far too late. Signor Graham has already *seen* him.

"You've lived all your life wrapped in the security blanket of your family's influence. You're swimming in money and you think you're invincible, but the truth is that you're just spoiled and naive. You think you're fucking Jack the Ripper with your pretty little scalpel, but I know for a fact that you would *weep* at the first sight of real blood," Signor Graham tells him, his tone harsh and derisive.

His index finger jabs Hannibal in the chest, driving the hurtful words home.

"I won't teach you my trade because you simply *don't have what it takes.*"

Signor Graham's finger is replaced by his whole palm, and he pushes Hannibal out of the way with one forceful shove against his sternum, flattening him against the wall. Deeming the conversation over, he bulldozes past Hannibal and continues making his way through the passage —

Only for Hannibal to catch his arm and pull him back with a sharp tug.

The sensation in his chest isn't just overbearing heat now, but the entire burning inferno raised from the depths of his damned soul. Hannibal pulls his fist back in preparation — knuckles facing down, arm close to his body, just like Sensei Du Maurier taught him —, aiming the blow right into the bridge of Signor Graham's nose.

He strikes.

Before his fist comes even close to the man's face, his wrist is caught and twisted, and the momentum of his body is used against him to slam him front first into the brick wall. Hannibal lets out a pained grunt. The collision of his chest and head with the wall hurts, but the stinging knowledge that he's no match for Signor Graham hurts even more.

And to add more salt to the wound, Hannibal feels the older man's low growl in his ear, so close that it may as well be vibrating against his skin.

"See? I told you so."

Signor Graham's hold on him disappears as it was never there. Hannibal's heartbeat ricochets in his chest, two shaky beats for every clack of the older man's custom-made Oxford shoes

against the concrete as he walks away. Hannibal lets out a slow exhale, dumbfounded and enraged in equal measures by whatever the hell just happened.

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When Uncle Robertus breaks the news that someone has been stealing from the family, Hannibal completely forgets to pretend to look surprised. The sour incident with Signor Graham left him frazzled, poisoning his thoughts with injustice and making his fingertips tremble with anger. As such, Hannibal spends the entire meeting shooting murderous glares at Signor Graham and stewing in the salty broth of his own bad-tasting feelings.

He was sure that Signor Graham *saw* him. Saw that there is a flipside to Hannibal's benign persona. Saw that his straight-A grades and never-ending scholarships are the result of using others as stepping stones to success, and that his doctor's coat is stained with blood of the patients he deems undeserving of life. Saw that Hannibal is not afraid to manipulate to get what he wants, and go as far as kill those who have wronged him and his family.

Saw that Hannibal will do *whatever it takes* to avenge his parents and little sister.

How is it possible that Signor Graham was so profoundly wrong about him? How could he look Hannibal in the eyes and say that he doesn't have what it takes? Hannibal grits his teeth. He is going to have to prove his worth to the older man. *Make him see*.

An icky nasal voice rips him out of his thoughts, bringing him crashing down into the present moment.

"What a lovely selection of finger food, don't you think, Signor Lecter?"

Hannibal almost jumps, turning on his heels to face the man that just spoke. He should've known this would happen. He's good at chess for god's sake, easily calculating his opponent's moves several steps ahead, so he should've been able to do the same in real life too. But he didn't. And now, Sogliato has zeroed in on him like a feral hawk that's spotted an unsuspecting little mouse.

Hannibal takes a large bite out of his prosciutto and peach canape and chews slowly, deliberately creating a minute to collect himself before responding.

Of course the traitorous, despicable excuse of a man would approach Hannibal right after the business meeting, under the guise of a friendly chat over some Caprese skewers. He figures that Sogliato desperately needs to gauge how much Hannibal saw of the deal that happened at the gallery, as it could cost him his precious association with the Lecter family. Or worse, his life.

Fortunately for Hannibal, Sogliato's approach seems more cautious than outright intimidating, as if he's testing the waters. The man is maintaining an air of harmlessness, for

now at least, scoping out exactly how much of a threat Hannibal poses before making any rash decisions.

But although Hannibal can tell that Sogliato's intentions are anything but innocent, there is nothing he can do to escape the conversation. They're surrounded by Uncle Robertus and his various associates, so it's impossible for Hannibal to slip away without attracting unwanted attention and suspicion. He straightens, summons up the confidence he doesn't quite have, and faces the ordeal head-on.

"The food is very nice indeed. Our chef has outdone himself."

"Would you come take a walk in the garden with me? There is something I need to talk to you about," Sogliato asks in his slick and unpleasantly-timbred voice.

It reminds Hannibal of the wet squelching sound when one steps into a puddle of water. All-round repulsive.

He takes another bite of the canape. Whatever Sogliato is planning can't be good, since he wants to talk to Hannibal alone in a secluded place. Hannibal has failed to predict this, thanks to Signor Graham succeeding in striking a raw nerve in him, so he doesn't have a plan. And he must always, *always* have a plan.

He glances at his wristwatch, pulling an apologetic frown onto his face.

"I would love to, Sir, but I'm afraid I must get going. I have classes this afternoon."

Sogliato's eyes narrow, making him look like a reptile in the sun. A disgusting, poisonous reptile. He can see through the lie, of course, but Hannibal isn't overly concerned about that. The point isn't to successfully lie to the man, but to force Sogliato to back down. For now.

"Perhaps another time?" Hannibal continues, letting the man know that he isn't refusing the bait, per se. He's simply postponing it until he is ready. Until he has the necessary upper hand. "I remember you mentioned during the meeting that you'll be coming by tomorrow evening to drop off some paperwork to my uncle."

"Correct. I'll come by after dinner time."

"Perfect. Until then, Signor Sogliato."

Hannibal's polite smile disappears immediately after he turns his back to Sogliato and starts walking away. Underneath the friendly mask maintained by sheer willpower, his head is buzzing from nervousness.

All things considered, it's highly unlikely that Sogliato would attempt something drastic like scaring him into silence with threats of violence. What Hannibal expects the man to do is maybe try gaslighting him into believing the exchange at the gallery was harmless, or engage in some light blackmail if he absolutely has to. Still, Hannibal figures that it's better to be safe and meet Sogliato on the familiar grounds of his home as opposed to somewhere else.

As he walks across the expansive courtyard towards the living quarters, he sends a text to Chiyoh asking to see her as soon as she's free from catering duties. Hannibal has a handful of friends he's made through his medical studies and extracurricular art classes, but his friendship with Chiyoh runs deeper than the rest. She had moved into the Lecter estate to be Aunt Murasaki's maid when she was 13 and Hannibal was 11; when the recent loss of Hannibal's parents and Mischa was still a bleeding wound in his heart. Perhaps that was the reason he became so close with Chiyoh so quickly. She became like a sister to him.

Chiyoh was the first and only person Hannibal shared his suspicions about Sogliato with. Thus, she is the one he would go to for advice regarding meeting the man. Not just for advice, but also for back up. There is something most people don't know about Chiyoh: she is as good at balancing a tray of twenty flutes of champagne as she is at breaking a man's ribs with one single punch. Beside being a maid, Chiyoh is also trained in martial arts and weaponry, to act as a bodyguard for Aunt Murasaki if it was ever needed.

Hannibal doesn't really believe that Chiyoh's fighting skills will be necessary during the meeting with Sogliato, but he'd like her to be there regardless. There is something deeply reassuring and empowering about having her stay in the shadows and watch out for him, like an evil eye talisman shielding its owner from sinister spirits.

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Uncle Robertus puts out his cigar by pressing it against the gold-plated ashtray on his desk and looks up.

"What is it, Hannibal?"

Hannibal crosses the vast space of Uncle Robertus's office, immediately sliding into the chair on the opposite side of the desk. A wordless indication that the conversion is going to take a while.

"I've been thinking about getting another martial arts teacher."

Uncle Robertus's expression changes from neutral to mildly quizzical. "Oh? What's wrong with Signora Du Maurier?"

"Nothing is wrong," Hannibal rushes to reassure. "I value her expertise highly."

Sensei Du Maurier has been his teacher for nearly a decade now. She's been there from Hannibal's first karate lesson as a child all the way to his black belt examination a few months ago. He has grown very fond of her over the years, and would hate to insinuate that she's outlived her usefulness when it comes to training him. Implying such a thing about his superior would be disrespectful and *rude*.

But the thing is, while Sensei Du Maurier has mountains of expertise behind her, Hannibal is younger, stronger and faster. She is no longer an equal opponent for him.

Hannibal criss-crosses his fingers in his lap and twirls his thumbs.

“I just think that it would be good for me to train with someone new for a change. To broaden my skills,” he says, voice light and conversational. Just enough for Uncle Robertus to see his suggestion as an idea in its own right rather than a cover for something else. “Someone who uses different methods, maybe.”

“I believe the training you’re getting from Signora Du Maurier is more than sufficient for the moment,” Uncle Robertus counters while idly straightening the disordered stacks of paper on his desk.

Judging by his somewhat absent tone and impassive expression, he doesn’t seem to consider Hannibal’s request to be particularly interesting or important. And for once, that kind of treatment is exactly what’s going to work in Hannibal’s favour. He doesn’t want his uncle to work out the real agenda of the conversation.

When Hannibal exhales, he makes sure it’s loud enough for the older man to notice. He bites his lip. Fidgets in his seat. Averts his eyes to the floor. *Anxious*.

“I can’t help but worry that now that we know someone’s betrayed the family, we might be facing bigger problems than just money theft.”

“We have men whose job is to deal with traitors, and keep you, me and your aunt safe. You don’t have to worry, Hannibal.”

Men like Signor Graham, Hannibal wants to say. But he refrains. That would be too fast of a segue, too obvious of a connection to draw. He needs to wait some more before bringing the man up.

What he does instead is meet Uncle Robertus’s eyes, establishing a connection. A connection like the juncture between an IV drip and a vein, through which Hannibal can feed carefully-measured grief and compassion into the older man’s blood.

“I still see that day in my nightmares, uncle.” Although evoked with a specific purpose, the sorrow that suddenly grips Hannibal’s heart and makes his voice waver is genuine. “If only I was *ready*… I could’ve fought, I could’ve saved them —”

“*Hannibal*.”

Normally, when cutting people off, Uncle Robertus’s tone is authoritative and imposing. This time, however, it carries a gentler aftertaste. Like a mug of hot chocolate that is sweet and soothing, despite the underlying base note of strong Kahlua in it.

“While regret and guilt are something we all have to live with, it doesn’t mean there was anything any of us could’ve done differently,” Uncle Robertus adds.

He is by no means a gentle man, and has never been. Without his iron-fist approach and unforgiving methods, the Lecters would not have been able to maintain and expand their influence throughout Italy. Uncle Robertus rarely allows himself a moment of vulnerability and to acknowledge the trauma his family went through when Hannibal's parents and Mischa were slaughtered by the hands of the enemy. But in the safety of their home and with only his nephew here to witness, Uncle Robertus allows a tiny crack to form in the walls that he's built.

He reaches out to place his palm on Hannibal's forearm. Hannibal leans into it, devouring the hot chocolate, soaking up the comfort and reassurance radiating from his uncle's gesture. Where Uncle Robertus's walls have been rebuilt to keep his grief inside, there is still a gaping hole in Hannibal's walls, with overwhelming amounts of mourning and heartache seeping through and wanting to be heard.

"If anything happened to you or auntie, I —" Hannibal's voice shakes again, then *breaks* , leaving anguished silence in its wake.

Uncle Robertus doesn't rush to speak, doesn't rush to bottle up the feelings that escaped through the cracks. He just sits, thumb rubbing Hannibal's arm in small and comforting circles. The silence hurts less when there is someone to share it with. The loss feels more manageable when neither of them has to go through it alone.

"I can organise someone to take you to a shooting range some time," Uncle Robertus says at last. "Get you familiar with the basics."

Behind Uncle Robertus's back, Hannibal has been familiar with the basics of guns for *years*. Chiyoh has taught him how to use her rifle, and once he discovered the cabinet Uncle Robertus keeps his weapons in, he found a way to pick the lock.

"I've heard Signor Graham is good with guns," Hannibal comments, the deliberate steering of the ship disguised as a casual mention.

Uncle Robertus waves his hand, dismissing the suggestion.

"Will is busy managing the family affairs. He has no time for a protégé."

Oh, what Hannibal wouldn't give for the privilege of getting to call the man by his first name. Signor Graham — *Will* — is going to learn very soon that he completely underestimated Hannibal's capacity for violence. And when he finally sees Hannibal for who he truly is, he's going to both recoil in fear and swoon in awe.

"It doesn't have to be much. I'd be grateful with whatever time he can grant me."

Uncle Robertus shakes his head, more adamant now.

"Will is not a suitable mentor. His methods are too… extreme."

Hannibal inclines his head, intrigued by the choice of word. *Extreme*.

All this time he saw Signor Graham as a well-trained attack dog, obeying his owner's every command and only baring its teeth when told to. But no, the way Uncle Robertus spoke of him just now suggests to Hannibal that Signor Graham may be a canine of a whole different kind. Although undoubtedly tamed by decades of working under Uncle Robertus's directive, he seems like a predator whose temper is too fiery to be fully disciplined and viciousness too great to be properly controlled. Hannibal's uncle may be holding the leash, but that doesn't mean the beast won't snap it like a frail twig if he so wishes.

While Hannibal sees the appeal in holding back the power and using only as much of it as necessary, he believes there are certain situations in which that power should reign unrestrained. *Extreme* wrongdoings deserve *extreme* punishments. Cruelty must be met with cruelty, and blood must be spilt for blood.

Hannibal looks at his uncle with a flavour of challenge in his eyes.

"What happened to our family was *extreme*."

Uncle Robertus pushes his chair back, a little too forceful to be considered an accident. The last resort of channeling frustration into an object before it takes over and makes him raise his voice at Hannibal.

"You are *not* to approach him regarding being your teacher," Uncle Robertus orders with unbreakable resolve. "Do you understand me?"

Hannibal nods, careful to keep his deep displeasure to himself.

What he thought was a fast ride getting him closer to accomplishing his revenge mission ended up being a foul ride that backfired royally. Not only has Signor Graham *not* been appointed by Uncle Robertus to be Hannibal's mentor, but Hannibal is now explicitly prohibited from approaching the man with this request.

All because his uncle is *scared* of the power he holds in his hands?

Hannibal has heard rumours from Chiyoh and Franklyn that Signor Graham took his first life when he was only 15. That he's deadlier with just his two hands than five men with guns. That his kill count is double his age. Some people might see those rumours as horror stories or warnings. But Hannibal sees them as holy gospel recognizing Signor Graham as the god of war.

He no longer wants guidance from someone like Sensei Du Maurier, who treats fighting as a form of art rather than a weapon. Hannibal wants someone who is raw and unhinged, singeing the surface of his skin if he gets too close. The man with glacier-cold eyes, knife-sharp tongue and cruel, magnificent, *beautiful* hands.

Although Hannibal has already been burned by Signor Graham's abrasive temper more than once, it only makes him want to play with the fire more.

Chapter End Notes

Did you spot the Jack Crawford cameo?

The Price of Greed

Chapter Summary

> Perhaps the man wasn't intending to shoot him, only to intimidate. But Hannibal had had enough of being intimidated, enough of being treated as unworthy of learning Signor Graham's trade, and enough of being seen as *incapable of rightful violence*.

Chapter Notes

> Our Hannibaby commits his first real murder!!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

A thick red droplet falls and lands on Hannibal's shoe. He shivers, breath fogging in the freezing night air. Despite the temperature, he feels anything but cold; the adrenaline in his bloodstream is like fiery whiskey, making every inch of his skin tingle like it's about to go up in flames.

Chiyoh's voice shatters the silence, high-pitched like a distress call of a bird alerting the rest of the flock that a predator is nearby. Small rocks crunch under her feet as she runs from her vantage point behind the trees towards the gravelled path Hannibal is standing on.

"Hannibal! Are you okay?"

He nods, one slow but sure movement of his head. The need for a distress call has already passed.

Chiyoh closes the distance between them, eyes immediately flicking to the dark heap vaguely resembling a person sprawled on the ground. Her hands that are clenched around the long body of her rifle squeeze harder, impossibly tight. She'd decided to bring her weapon when watching out for Hannibal tonight, but with the way things turned out, she didn't end up needing it at all.

"Hannibal, what the hell did you do?" Chiyoh demands, although deep inside she must already know.

Hannibal closes his eyes and breathes deep, in and out. What the hell *did* he do?

The evening stroll in the garden with Sogliato had started just how he'd anticipated. After exactly thirty seconds of mandatory small talk and pleasantries, the man delved into the real

topic of the conversation, which was to assure Hannibal that nothing dishonest had happened at the Uffizi Gallery. Sogliato even went as far as to blatantly lie that he was on special orders from Uncle Robertus to deliver cash to an associate.

Signor Graham's words rang in Hannibal's head: *You simply don't have what it takes.*

The look he gave Sogliato was drenched in utter disdain, and he scornfully spat out that he didn't believe a single word the man said. That made it painstakingly obvious to Sogliato that he wasn't going to convince Hannibal to stay quiet via nonviolent methods. He cursed and dove into his pocket to pull out a small pistol.

And Hannibal, having feared things would take such a dangerous turn, pulled out a knife.

Perhaps the man wasn't intending to shoot him, only to intimidate. But Hannibal had had enough of being intimidated, enough of being treated as unworthy of learning Signor Graham's trade, and enough of *being seen as incapable of rightful violence*.

The gun emitted a quiet click as Sogliato thumbed off the safety, and before he could make another move, Hannibal struck.

It was a quick lunge; a lightning-fast movement of his feet and a determined swing of his arm. Before he knew it, the knife was stuck in Sogliato's stomach. Still overtaken by the survival instinct, Hannibal wrung the gun out of the older man's hand, sending him tumbling on the ground. As he coughed up more and more blood and tried to scream, the thought that crossed Hannibal's mind wasn't "*oh no, I just stabbed a man, I need to get him help*"...

It was "*I'm glad no one is going to see or hear this".*

Sogliato had taken them to the far end of the garden, just on the border of the Lecter property, and this secluded location of his own choosing ended up sealing his fate. The groundskeeper, Eldon, has finished his work for the day hours ago, so there's not a soul around except for them two. And Chiyoh.

Upon not getting a verbal response from Hannibal, Chiyoh drops her rifle on the gravel with a loud clatter and grabs his shoulders to shake him. The brusque motion stops Hannibal's mind from replaying what just happened and forces him to focus on the present.

"I'm okay," he answers, tongue stumbling over the words. His mouth feels like it doesn't belong to him, and the same could be said about his entire body.

It would be easy to give in to the sensation, to pretend even just for a moment that he didn't mercilessly stab a man with his own hands mere minutes ago. To pretend that his actions were controlled by somebody else. But no, Hannibal doesn't like that idea, not one bit. Right now, there is nobody else he would rather have his body belong to. This is his house, his family, and his chance to dispense justice.

His kill.

When Hannibal uncurls Chiyoh's fists that are still clutching the front of his jacket in a death grip, he makes sure to do so gently, as a deliberate counter-action to the cold-blooded and savage act he just committed. To prove to himself that there is still tenderness left in his hands. To reassure himself that he hasn't completely lost control.

Satisfied that Hannibal is unharmed, Chiyoh turns her attention to the man on the ground. Sogliato's helpless wailing has been reduced to shaking sobs, and his blood-covered body has stopped twitching violently in favour of attempting to draw in its last ragged breaths. In another minute, he stills completely.

Chiyoh blinks, unable to tear her eyes off the pathetic mass of flesh that once was a man, utter shock holding her body hostage for a few more moments. Hannibal stares without taking his eyes off, too. His limbs feel too heavy to move, but his mind is on fire.

"You *killed* him," Chiyoh states eventually, her voice oddly blank. Too stunned for proper emotion.

Hannibal nods again, slowly moving his gaze to her. He knows that much like himself, Chiyoh has recurring nightmares about flying bullets and endless screams, too. She hasn't told Hannibal what happened to her that made her have such disturbing dreams, but he can tell it was something deeply scarring. This is very likely not the first violent death Chiyoh has witnessed in her life. So, what astounds her more than the murder itself is the fact that it was *Hannibal* who executed it.

It's one thing to hear Chiyoh sympathize with Hannibal's desire to some day get revenge on the men that took away his family, and another to see him kill a man practically on their doorstep. Thinking about murder is very different from actually committing it, and Hannibal doesn't know how Chiyoh would feel about the latter. Before another word comes out of her mouth, however, Hannibal directs her attention to the pistol on the ground.

"If I didn't, he would've shot me."

Chiyoh's throat clicks as she swallows. From the way she forces warm air out of her lungs with a strong puff and the way her eyes narrow just the tiniest amount, Hannibal can tell the confused bewilderment in her has been replaced by a flare of protective anger.

If he hadn't hesitated with the knife, what would've killed Sogliato a second later would've been Chiyoh's bullet.

"Fuck..." she mumbles, barely audible.

She doesn't swear often — neither of them do as the result of being raised by Aunt Murasaki — but right now, the situation calls for it. Hannibal's chest rises and falls a few more times, and then resolve sets into his eyes.

"We can't tell anyone," he says, rolling his shoulders to make the stiffness from the cold and the nerves dissipate.

"But —"

“We *can't*,” Hannibal cuts her off, more adamant this time.

Chiyoh bites her lip as understanding sets into her features. Hannibal thanks every god and deity on the planet for the fact that she is smart and level-headed. Having to spell out exactly why they can’t tell Uncle Robertus, or anyone else for that matter, is the last thing he wants to do right now.

He still doesn’t have any proof of Sogliato being the traitor his uncle is after. And Hannibal slaughtering an esteemed business associate supposedly without a legitimate cause would create a plethora of nasty complications, not just for him but for his whole family. He will tell his uncle everything, but only once he can prove that the man he murdered is far from innocent.

Uncle Robertus will be shocked to learn what Hannibal is capable of. But Signor Graham will be *proud.* He will finally see how wrong he was about Hannibal’s true colours. And Hannibal can’t wait.

“Fine, alright,” Chyoh concedes and picks up her rifle off the ground. “So you suggest we cover it up?”

A warm sensation ignites in Hannibal’s chest at her use of ‘we’, a little source of heat in the otherwise cold and unforgiving world. Despite being solely responsible for robbing Sogliato of his life, he isn’t in this alone. Without Chiyoh’s unwavering support, he doubts he would’ve had the courage to confront Sogliato about his treachery in the first place.

“Yeah,” he says slowly, making up a plan as he goes. “I’m going to get rid of the body now, and you —”

“I’m coming with you.”

Chiyoh may approve of him killing a traitor and even be willing to help him deal with the consequences, but Hannibal strongly doubts she would approve of the exact things he plans to do with the body. Stabbing Sogliato hadn’t been something Hannibal had *planned* to do, per se, but now that it’s become reality, his mind can’t help but remember the little daydream he had. The one where he turned the man’s body into a stunning tableau that showcases his wrongdoings.

“No, someone has to stay here to clean up,” Hannibal tells Chiyoh, glancing at the puddle of blood underneath Sogliato’s now lifeless corpse.

The gravel is stained red. Once the sun rises, the groundskeepers will quickly discover it and create a mass panic. It doesn’t feel right to leave Chiyoh to clean up the mess, especially one she didn’t cause. But the other alternative is getting rid of the body and Sogliato’s car that he drove to the estate, and it’s clear which is the less difficult option out of the two. Hannibal knows Chiyoh is tough like iron, both mentally and physically, but he wants to spare her from having to deal with a dead body as much as possible. Not because he thinks she is weak, but because he cares for her profoundly.

“Okay. If anybody asks where we were tonight, I’ll say we were outside working on my star chart,” Chiyoh decides, her brain now shifted into the planning mode too.

Stargazing is how Chiyoh spends her time when she’s not busy tending to Lady Murasaki’s needs. Her telescope is set up in one of the rooms on the top floor of the mansion, along with a table dedicated to sky charts that she draws herself based on her observations of the night sky. Sometimes, when weather permits, she and Hannibal bring the telescope outside onto the big grassy area next to the mansion for better visibility and range.

Hannibal knows he can always count on Chiyoh’s inventiveness and quick thinking. *Atta girl*.

“Thanks. Can you help me get the body into the car?”

Without waiting for an answer, Hannibal picks up the bloodstained knife and Sogliato’s gun and tucks both into the pockets of his jacket. Then, on second thought, he transfers them into the pockets of his jeans, shrugs off the jacket, and begins wrapping it around the dead man’s midriff, right over the gaping wound. He can feel Chiyoh’s puzzled gaze drill into his back as he works.

“I don’t want any blood to drip off him while we carry him,” he explains to Chiyoh.

The thick fabric of the jacket should help soak up the remaining blood that hasn’t had a chance to coagulate yet, preventing it from spreading anywhere along the trek to the car. An impromptu way of containing the evidence, of sorts. It’s a nice jacket, made of sandy-beige tweed, and Hannibal quite likes it. However, he managed to get Sogliato’s blood on it when he first swung the knife, and thus, he will have to burn it. It’s a shame, but it’s better than risking being caught for murder before he’s ready to come forward about it himself.

Chiyoh nods, slings the rifle over her shoulder by its strap, and lifts Sogliato’s legs. Hannibal, in turn, hauls up the man’s weight by hooking his arms under Sogliato’s armpits. The journey to the carpark located in the front part of the estate is more difficult than usual, because they have to stay off the paved paths. They can’t take any chances of being seen, in case any of the people inhabiting the mansion happen to decide to go outside for a nightly stroll.

“I’m going to take care of the body and then drop the car back to his house,” Hannibal informs Chiyoh quietly as they tread between large bushes. “To make it look like he went home between visiting Uncle Robertus and disappearing.”

It’s the easiest way to direct the suspicion away from the Lecters. Besides, Hannibal needs to find proof of Sogliato’s misdeeds, the sooner the better. If he has to search through the man’s house to achieve it, then so be it. And there is no better time to do so than at night, when he has nowhere else to be and his movements are concealed by the darkness.

“Now?! Hannibal, are you *crazy*?” Chiyoh hisses, looking at him like he’s a lunatic. “You can’t go to his house, he’ll have a butler or a maid there. You’ll be caught.”

Hannibal glances down at the man’s cheaply-made suit, not bothering to cover up his distaste regarding the poor design and material.

“Judging by the way he dresses, he can’t afford a butler or a maid.”

Chiyoh doesn’t look fully convinced, but agrees anyway. “Okay, fine. Be careful though.”

Hannibal musters up a small but reassuring smile. Sogliato’s car, a cream-coloured mid-range Mercedes, further proves his point that the man acts wealthier than he really is. Hannibal peruses Sogliato’s pockets for the car keys, locating them quickly and then popping the trunk open.

The man’s limp and cold body hits the bottom of the trunk with a thud, making the car’s suspension creak and sink by an inch. Both Hannibal and Chiyoh pant from the spent effort.

“I will,” Hannibal promises her. “I’ll need a ride back home once I’m finished. Come get me when I call you, alright?”

Chiyoh’s mouth is a tight line, showing just how much she disapproves of Hannibal’s adventurous plan, but she acquiesces nonetheless.

“You’ve got to give me your keys then.”

Chiyoh can drive, but she doesn’t have her own car. Hannibal didn’t have one either, up until recently. The sleek and midnight-blue Porsche that he’d chosen himself was an 18th birthday present from Uncle Robertus and Aunt Murasaki. Although they prefer that Hannibal is driven everywhere by Franklyn as an additional layer of protection, Hannibal has successfully argued his point that he needs some independence now that he’s an adult.

For example, if he showed up to a date accompanied by a chaperone driver, the girl would almost certainly not agree to another date with him. Hannibal knows that his aunt and uncle are eager for him to eventually get married and have children, especially because Hannibal is the only Lecter of his generation. It’s imperative that their bloodline can continue and the family business can be passed on to a worthy successor. Thus, it was easy to convince them to let Hannibal have his own car, using the excuse that it would make his dating endeavours easier.

Of course, there are many other benefits to being able to come and go from the estate without the need for a chauffeur, too. Such as, providing the necessary transportation when one is covering up a murder.

Hannibal closes the trunk of Sogliato’s car with a soft click and pockets the keys. “Sure. There’s a few more things I need to pick up from my room before I go, anyway.”

They return to the living quarters using proper paths this time, since they don’t have a body to hide. Hannibal quickly swings by his room, picking up his car keys for Chiyoh, as well as a complete change of clothes, a pack of medical grade gloves, his set of surgical instruments, and a few other supplies he will need for what he has in mind.

He meets up with Chiyoh again in the foyer. She looks at the large bag of supplies quizzically, but thankfully doesn’t question Hannibal about it. He notices that Chiyoh has swapped her rifle for a shovel, to get rid of the blood-stained gravel and smooth out the

surface of the road afterwards. As they step back into the cool air outside, Hannibal turns to look at her.

“Will you be alright? I know I’m asking a lot of you.”

Although Hannibal doesn’t regret what he’s done tonight, including getting Chiyoh involved, he doesn’t want this to have an adverse effect on her well-being. Despite the tough exterior, he knows Chiyoh has a vulnerable side underneath. However, she shrugs at the question and waves her hand in a dismissive fashion.

“It’s you I’d be worried about,” Chiyoh counters, stern but caring. She pokes Hannibal in the arm. “If I don't hear from you in 2 hours, Hannibal, I swear to god…”

The threat only makes him smile. Chiyoh is just as protective of him as he is of her.

They part where the paved path splits into two directions, one leading towards the murder scene at the back of the estate, and the other leading to the cars. As Hannibal briskly makes his way back to Sogliato’s Mercedes, he digs out an additional sweater from his bag of supplies and pulls it on, shielding himself from the cold.

It’s going to be a long night.

***

Will Graham’s glacier-blue eyes are shining brighter than ever, drinking in the breathtaking display. His face is the embodiment of pure awe, mesmerized by the gift Hannibal has prepared specifically for him. And his perfect, seraphic lips are parted in delight, devouring the tableau in front of him. Savouring the taste. The grotesquely beautiful art piece doesn’t sate his hunger, but only makes it stronger. Now he wants *to taste the artist, too.*

He sweeps Hannibal off his feet and captures him into a crushing embrace, the way a ravaging tornado swallows up an entire city. In the centre of that dizzying vortex, Will crashes their lips together with the strength that makes them both see stars. Hannibal lets out a silent gasp, melting into the kiss that he’s been yearning far too long for.

The next minute he finds himself completely naked — on the floor, on the table, on the bed, it doesn’t matter — with Will’s godlike body on top of him, just as bare. Still kissing him with devastating passion, but now also letting his scalding-hot hands explore Hannibal’s body and map out every inch of his skin. Claiming, worshipping, *loving*.

Their joining can only be described as ecstatic. The mutual desire is too powerful to be contained inside their bodies, so it spills into the air between them, putting sweet fervour into every thrust of Will’s hips against Hannibal’s, every drag of Will’s cock inside him.

It’s beautiful.

Hannibal doesn't think he can last much longer, not with the way that every cell in his body is filled with overwhelming pleasure. He wraps his arms around Will's refined back, bringing them impossibly closer, molding them into one entity. And then, dashing through the sky like a shooting star, crashing down like a meteor on fire, he comes —

Spilling his release onto the sweat-soaked sheets of his own bed.

Hannibal's eyelids flutter open, the last lustful moans stuck to his lips. His arms instinctively reach out, trying to hold onto Will for a little longer. But with every grasp, with every second spent more awake than asleep, he becomes more and more aware that this man doesn't exist anywhere but in his dreams. Dreams that dissipate faster than they'd begun. Longing fills Hannibal's bones, already missing the lover he's never even had.

He sighs. His body is satisfied from the physical release, but his mind and heart still ache, their needs so far unfulfilled. Hannibal stays like that for a few minutes, lying down with his eyes closed, desperately chasing one more moment of the heavenly dream. But the harder he tries to catch it, the farther out of reach it gets. Loneliness is more devastating now that he's had a taste of what *could be*. Even if only in his rose-coloured dreams.

Reluctantly, Hannibal opens his eyes and glances at the clock. It's 9:50 AM, meaning he has exactly ten minutes to get himself to the weekly business meeting.

Shit.

Hannibal scrambles out of bed, almost tripping over the sheets as he goes. He haphazardly pulls on the first presentable-looking set clothes that he can find in his wardrobe — grey slacks, a white button-up shirt, and a beige cashmere sweater over it. Breakfast is definitely out of the question, but he allows a minute each for brushing his hair and teeth. His body is still groggy from sleep and oversensitive from the wet dream, so it takes longer than Hannibal expected to get moving and ready.

To his absolute mortification, he has no time to clean up the mess he's made on his bed either; the evidence of his boundless desire for the man who refuses to acknowledge his potential. *Their potential together.* Hannibal shoves his feelings back to the depths of his hopeless heart and dashes out of his room. He pauses only for a split second to make sure the door is locked behind him, to stop maids from coming in for their routine clean.

By jogging across the grassy field separating the living quarters from Uncle Robertus's office and then cutting through the courtyard, Hannibal manages to enter the building just as the last of the guests trickle into the meeting room through the open doors. He quickly follows them, and although he is the last person to enter the room, he is not late.

Hannibal gets into his assigned seat, still short of breath from his jog, but swimming in relief. Preoccupied with just sitting still for a moment and letting his heart rate even out, he doesn't immediately catch on to the peculiar undercurrent present in the room. But once he's noticed it, it becomes impossible to ignore.

The windows that are normally showing off the vast expanse of the Lecter property have now been completely covered with curtains, making the room appear darker than usual. In the

back corner, Hannibal notices a projector that wasn't there before. Sogliato's chair is empty, which draws puzzled looks from several guests, but none from Uncle Robertus or Signor Graham. If anything, the expressions on both men's faces are darkened with grim knowledge.

They know what happened to Sogliato, there is no doubt about that. Considering the rather predictable place Hannibal left the body in, he isn't surprised that it only took one full day for the news to reach Uncle Robertus and his consigliere.

Signor Graham rises from his chair and positions himself at the head of the table, while Uncle Robertus takes a step or two to the side to give him room. Hannibal doesn't give much thought to this interesting change in their dynamic, in favour of being captivated by the man's appearance. Signor Graham's glacier eyes are a hundred degrees colder than usual, and there is a tense edge to his posture. Hannibal guesses this means that his work on Sogliato has caught the man by surprise.

The projector comes to life, producing a large square of light onto the wide wall. Hence the closed curtains, Hannibal deduces. Signor Graham hops to sit on the table, crossing one leg ankle over knee, remote in his hand. Such bold disregard to proper manners, which Uncle Robertus would undoubtedly and openly disapprove of. But he doesn't say anything, unwilling to disrupt the authoritative aura that surrounds Signor Graham in the moment.

To Hannibal, however, Signor Graham's provocative behaviour suggests that he is more agitated than he'd like to show. Sitting on the table is a statement, made to mask the uncertainty brewing inside him.

"I'd like to share with you a few images from my personal photo gallery," Signor Graham announces to the room.

His voice is unnaturally detached, no doubt put on to hide whatever other feelings are swirling in his chest. Surprise — relating to Sogliato being exposed as the thief and brutally punished for it? Apprehension — regarding not knowing who the killer behind it was? Perhaps even admiration — for the killer's skill and creativity in displaying the body? Hannibal certainly hopes for the last one.

Weirdly enough, the entire situation reminds Hannibal of the first day of classes with a new lecturer. This one is shaping up to be unorthodox in his teaching methods and uncompromising in his classroom discipline. The students, immediately catching on that this teacher is not someone they want to mess with, don't speak and instead angle their chairs in order to see the screen better. Signor Graham presses a button on the remote, and the first picture appears.

"I took these yesterday, for your *explicit viewing pleasure*," he tells the audience. However, the rough edge in his voice suggests that the images are going to be anything but pleasant.

The first picture depicts the dining room in Sogliato's house, with an elongated wooden table in the middle of the frame. A man sits at the head of the table, with his back facing the camera. Although his face is hidden from view, a low murmur can be heard among the meeting attendees, implying that they've recognized the person. Hannibal's eyes flick

towards the only empty seat in the room. The timbre of the muffled voices grows concerned once somebody spots droplets of blood on the photo, next to the chair the man is sitting on.

“Is that… Signor Sogliato?” one brave soul speaks up, putting into words what nobody else has had the courage to say yet.

Colourful patterned scarf. Wavy brown hair with grey accents. Hannibal peruses his memory for the man’s name. Antony Dimmond.

Signor Graham’s sharp eyes meet his. “It sure is.”

Signor Dimmond’s pupils widen at that, but he doesn’t say anything more.

The next photo shows Sogliato’s lifeless corpse captured from the front. He’s sitting at the table looking like he’s about to dive into a delicious meal, but instead of food, the plate in front of him has an assortment of coins, bills, and several cheques detailing bank deposits.

“The amounts on those cheques match the exact amounts that have gone missing from the family,” Signor Graham explains, telling everyone in the room loud and clear that this man, the traitor and the thief, has now paid for his crimes.

It had been relatively easy for Hannibal to find the cheques, almost ridiculously easy. Sogliato really thought he was smart, keeping them stashed in the top drawer of his desk. Granted, the drawer had a fake bottom, but since Hannibal was specifically looking for hidden things, the secret compartment didn’t go unnoticed by him.

Pride at his achievements exudes from his chest and makes him square his shoulders and sit up straighter in his chair. It’s difficult to resist looking up at Signor Graham, to gauge his reaction if not outright seek approval, but Hannibal resists anyway. He doesn’t want to give himself up too early.

A few guests start to shift in their seats, visibly uncomfortable with being forced to look at a dead body. However, they immediately quieten and settle down again upon hearing Signor Graham’s authoritative voice.

“I have some close-ups, too. Don’t want anyone to miss the details.”

He flicks the remote again, bringing up a detailed image of the large laceration in Sogliato’s abdomen. A sizable section of the skin and flesh has been neatly removed to reveal the organs underneath. Specifically, the man’s stomach, which appears to be filled with something and stretched to its limits, to the point of practically bulging out of his body. Hannibal doesn’t need to study the picture in detail to *know* that the liver and kidneys have been extracted to make room for the obscenely enlarged stomach that’s a second away from bursting.

In his mind’s eye, Hannibal can see Signor Graham inspecting the mutilated body with unrestrained curiosity and leaning down to poke at the straining stomach. The contact, although light, makes the stretched tissue finally give in and tear. A sea of coins spills out of the man’s gut like a waterfall made of clinking metal, filling his lap, the table, and the floor

underneath with glittering gold and silver. The next photo in the series confirms Hannibal's speculations, depicting exactly what happened in his imagination.

Judging by the way Signor Graham's eyes start surveying everyone in the room, that was the last image he wanted to show. The reactions exhibited by the crowd are of varying degrees of disgust and shock.

Abigail Hobbs is biting her own hand to stop herself from shrieking out loud. Antony Dimmond's hand is covering his eyes. Uncle Robertus's gaze is averted to the adjacent wall and his mouth drawn into a taut line, the gruesome photo set clearly way too graphic for his tastes.

"Any thoughts?" Signor Graham prompts the crowd.

The resemblance to a manic lecturer interrogating a classroom of stunned first-year students intensifies.

"He got what was coming for him," says Tobias Budge.

Out of everyone in the room, except Signor Graham and Hannibal himself, he seemed the least bothered by the macabre display. Considering that he works as a bodyguard for the family, Hannibal figures it isn't all that surprising.

"I just can't believe —," Abigail Hobbs begins, her usually melodic and pleasant-sounding voice now riddled with shock. "I can't believe he betrayed us. He was sitting right next to me the whole time, he liked telling me jokes and making me laugh…"

She trails off, shaking her head.

"He fooled all of us for a while, Signora Hobbs. Traitors like him are a filthy breed," Signor Graham says.

His stern and cold voice turns just a tad gentler when he speaks to her, and Hannibal feels something in his chest flare at that gentleness. *Jealousy*. His heart yearns to be talked to like that, with the same tenderness. Hannibal remembers the too-good-to-be-true dream he had, a small shiver running through his spine.

Signor Graham's eyes leave Signora Hobbs, turning his attention back to the room as a whole.

"And more importantly, traitors like him will be caught and punished accordingly."

His tone is resolute and leaves no room for argument or hesitation. It's a warning to every guest present not to repeat Sogliato's mistakes. But Hannibal can't help but notice that the way Signor Graham speaks of it is as if he was personally involved in bringing justice to the thief. As if *he* is the one they should be afraid of. Hannibal scrunches his nose a little at the unfairness of it all, itching to be recognised for his efforts. But all in due time.

He plans to talk to his uncle and Signor Graham in private, right after the meeting. He doesn't want any unnecessary audience or interruptions as he reveals himself as the killer. Just in case

they don't believe him at first, and he is forced to present proof that he was indeed the one who slayed Sogliato and made an art piece out of his corpse. Hannibal has such proof, but he would strongly prefer to be believed simply on his word.

Another reason he wants a private setting is because his grand reveal would be accompanied with a proposition. Or an ultimatum, rather. Signor Graham and Uncle Robertus won't be able to say no to it, not anymore. Finally, now, they will have to face the reality that Hannibal is capable of immense violence, and Signor Graham will have no choice but to train him.

The anticipation of it all fills Hannibal with bubbling excitement. *Finally*.

Signor Graham watches the people at the table, drinking in their agitated expressions and basking in the air of trepidation he's created.

"Those who disrespect the Lecter family will always pay. I can assure you that I will personally see to it," he says, bringing up one last image.

It's a striking finish to his impromptu lecture; a haunting close-up of Sogliato's face. Or rather, what is left of it. The man's eyes are missing, with large gold coins stuck into his eye sockets instead. His jaw looks like it's been dislodged in order to get it as wide open as possible. Hundreds of crumpled twenty, fifty and hundred dollar bills have been stuffed into the man's mouth, so many that he would've choked on them if he were still alive at that point.

And then, amidst all the details Hannibal had so carefully thought out and arranged, there is a foreign element that wasn't part of his design. A fishing lure, stuck through the man's lip in a manner Hannibal is all too familiar with.

Staining the tableau with a signature that isn't Hannibal's. Attributing the creation to Signor Graham, even though he had nothing to do with it. Taking credit for Hannibal's hard work in a way that is so blatantly *rude.*

Breath hitches in Hannibal's throat, and his vision turns red at the edges. How dare Signor Graham stand here and preach about respect when what he's done to Hannibal is all shades of disrespectful?

Hannibal's jaw ticks. Up until this time, despite being treated coldly by Signor Graham, he has felt deep admiration towards the man. But now, that admiration has been stained with something sour. A dark and visceral desire for revenge. To dispense justice and defend his honour. Signor Graham may think he's invincible, but the truth is that he should watch out. Now, more than ever.

Because he is right: *Those who disrespect the Lecter family will always pay*.

Chapter End Notes

Any theories as to why Will took credit of the kill? Let me know in the comments!

The Eye-Opening Gift

Chapter Summary

> “I’m glad that you are impressed with my work. However, there was no need to pass it as yours,” Hannibal informs the older man sternly.
>
> Signor Graham’s eyes snap open, the piercing ice-cold blue in them almost making Hannibal shiver. “I did what I had to, because you were reckless.”
>
> The ire brewing inside Hannibal boils over and turns into bravery. The indiscriminate and foolish kind of bravery that doesn’t come without consequences. But right now, he can’t bring himself to care. He’s been disrespected far too much and far too long.
>
> “Reckless how?” he challenges, leaning forward in his seat in a daring manner. “Because I did your job for you?”
>
> As soon as the unwise words leave his mouth, Hannibal knows he crossed the line.

Chapter Notes

> Things finally work out for Hannibal!!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

> On Wednesdays, the Lecters’ chef has the evening off. Those nights are when Hannibal reigns in the kitchen and works his culinary magic to treat his family to an elaborate meal. This Wednesday, however, he has other plans.
>
> Hannibal is aware just how surprised Uncle Robertus, Aunt Murasaki, and even Chiyoh, would be to learn that he’s willingly arranged a commitment that clashes with his weekly cooking night, because they know how much he loves and anticipates them. So, to avoid suspicion, Hannibal resorts to telling his family that he has scored a date for this Wednesday.
>
> Meeting “a girl from class he’s been interested in since the start of term” sounds like a more acceptable option than meeting “a man who’s much older than him but way more enticing than anyone in his class”, although the latter is significantly closer to the truth. Besides, Hannibal doesn’t know how his aunt and uncle would react upon learning that he enjoys gentlemen’s company as much as ladies’. Thus, for now, Hannibal decides to entertain the assumption that he is only interested in dating women.

The drive to the so-called date takes longer than Hannibal anticipated. Then again, when he first saw the address, he didn't recognise the suburb, which means the man he is meeting must live a fair way outside Florence. The road takes Hannibal south-east, away from the urban areas and deeper into the Italian countryside.

The property is not as big as the Lecter estate, but it looks neat and well-maintained, with a simple but prestigious-looking white house in the middle of the luscious greenery. The sun has almost set, but Hannibal can spot the last glimmering rays reflecting off the surface of what looks like a small river running through the back of the property. He parks next to the familiar silver Cadillac and heads to the front door. Despite the slight tinge of nervousness hiding in his chest, he keeps his back straight and his posture confident.

The door is opened by a young woman with long blonde hair and a pleasant smile.

"*Buona sera*, *Signor*," she greets. "How can I help you?"

"Good evening, Signora..." Hannibal trails off politely, inviting her to introduce herself.

"Madchen."

Not related to Signor Graham, then. A maid, perhaps?

"Signora Madchen. I'm Hannibal Lecter, here to see Signor Graham."

Her eyebrows rise a little in surprise, no doubt as a result of learning that Hannibal is part of the noble Lecter family. Then, an apologetic blush coats her cheeks.

"Oh, I'm sorry, sir, I wasn't aware Will is expecting someone."

Signora Madchen immediately steps to the side, inviting Hannibal to come in. Judging by her mannerisms and clothing, she is most definitely a servant, but what Hannibal thought was particularly strange is that she referred to Signor Graham by his first name. Hannibal guesses it means the man doesn't care much for formalities, and instead prefers to promote a more equal and relaxed relationship between himself and his employees. It seems uncharacteristic of the stoic persona with a fear-inducing reputation that Hannibal knows Signor Graham to be. But on the other hand, he doesn't really know the man that well.

Hannibal wonders if he will soon get to call Signor Graham 'Will' too. The thought makes a spark of hope ignite in his chest. However, it is immediately extinguished when he remembers the very reason he's come to meet the man.

"He wasn't, it's an unexpected visit," Hannibal assures Signora Madchen with a warm smile as he steps into the large foyer. "I'm here to deliver an important package from my uncle, Robertus Lecter."

The maid smiles, not giving Hannibal's words a second thought.

"If you wouldn't mind waiting here just a moment, I will let him know now."

Hannibal nods, taking a seat in one of the comfortable-looking armchairs by the door. Much like the outdoor part of the property, the interior of the foyer is not as lavish as the one in Hannibal's mansion, but still atmospheric and tasteful. The walls and most of the furniture are a warm shade of oak, giving the place a rustic feel. It's almost like being in a luxurious cabin in the middle of the woods.

There is a large staircase in the middle leading to the second floor, which Hannibal guesses contains the bedrooms. He has done enough research on Signor Graham to know the man is not married and doesn't have any children. Hannibal wonders if this means he lives in this house alone, with only his maid and chauffeur to keep him company.

Signora Madchen turns to leave, but before she gets far, there is a sound of footsteps coming from above. They both look up to see Signor Graham at the top of the stairs.

His appearance is the most accurate embodiment of unguarded and intimate domesticity Hannibal has ever seen. Signor Graham is wearing a dark blue plush bathrobe that's only loosely tied at the waist, exposing a sliver of smooth and refined chest underneath. The man's calves are exposed too, since the robe doesn't reach that far down, and Hannibal can see every muscle of his toned legs. Signor Graham's hair is damp from the shower or bath he clearly took quite not long ago, making the brown locks look darker and curlier. His facial hair is freshly groomed, accentuating the angular shape of his jawline.

Overall, Signor Graham looks relaxed and comfortable, safe in his home away from the gruesome nature of his job and Uncle Robertus's demands. Hannibal feels like he can see more of the man this way, without layers of formalwear and the rigid over-polite mannerisms in the way. As such, Signor Graham looks almost vulnerable.

However, Hannibal is sure that is not the case. The man's two hands alone are the deadliest of weapons, no matter how harmless he may seem right now. Hannibal finds himself staring for longer than is exactly appropriate.

"Thank you Georgia, I'll take it from here," Signor Graham says, waving his hand that's holding a half-empty tumbler of whiskey on the rocks. Then, he bestows his glacier-blue eyes upon Hannibal. "Signor Lecter, what a surprise."

Hannibal clears his throat, regarding the older man with a stiff nod for a greeting, courteous but very minimally so. He has a bone to pick with Signor Graham; namely, to confront him about taking credit for Hannibal's tableau. Despite being younger and of lesser status within the family business, Hannibal won't allow such disrespect.

He stands up, expression cool and poised.

"I have a delivery from my uncle," he states, motioning to the box wrapped in brown paper in his hand.

Signor Graham inclines his head, inquisitive eyes probing at Hannibal's put-on armor. Looking for the lie, and most likely finding it, too.

“I see. Please, follow me,” he says, appearing skeptical but still willing to entertain whatever Hannibal has in mind, for now. “You may take the rest of the night off, Georgia. I will see Signor Lecter out myself.”

The maid nods and leaves, while Hannibal ascends the stairs to join Signor Graham at the top.

The older man doesn’t wait around. He heads straight down the hallway, bare feet clapping against hardwood flooring. Hannibal hurries after him, desperately trying not to look and feel like a lost puppy, completely out of his comfort zone in an unfamiliar place and unfamiliar situation. He has to mentally slap himself to get out of that mind space. He’s a *killer*, for god’s sake, and he’s here to assert his claim over the work he did on Sogliato.

This is his time to show that he isn’t afraid of getting his hands dirty and to prove himself as worthy of being trained in the art of violence. No matter what Signor Graham says.

The man opens the door of what looks like a study or office of some sort. The interior is similarly rustic like the rest of the house, albeit less ostentatious. In the middle there is a large desk, much like in Uncle Robertus’s office, but that’s where the similarities end. Signor Graham’s office has less flashy gold and silver ornaments and more earthy and grounded tones; browns, beiges and greens. Hannibal notices another desk in the corner, fully dedicated to what looks like fly tying equipment. Next to it sits a large but soft-looking dog bed.

Hannibal is tempted to make friendly conversation and ask about the dog. He didn’t think Signor Graham would be the type to have pets. Perhaps another time, though. He isn’t here to chat, but to present the man with a striking ultimatum.

Signor Graham takes a seat at the main desk in the middle. The lapels of his robe pull apart even further as a result, showing more of his flawlessly-shaped chest. Hannibal has to put *conscious effort* into making his eyes stay on the man’s face and not stray downwards.

He sits in the chair on the opposite side of the desk and leans back, maintaining an air of professional detachment. After placing the package between them on the desk, Hannibal pushes it towards Signor Graham in a silent command to open it.

The older man picks up the box and inspects it idly, but doesn’t make a move to open it just yet.

“You do realise that your uncle would never send me anything without personally notifying me first, right?” he drawls. “Dare I say he doesn’t even know you’re here.”

Hannibal decides not to comment, knowing Signor Graham hit the nail on the head.

“You can consider yourself notified,” he says curtly instead.

The other man gives him an amused half-smile, which indicates he isn’t put off by Hannibal’s visible lack of manners. He finishes the rest of his whiskey, puts the glass down, and finally begins unwrapping the brown packaging. Beneath the paper lies a black square-shaped container that resembles a jewelry box. Small enough to fit a pair of cufflinks or a watch.

Hannibal watches intently as Signor Graham slowly lifts the lid, curiosity shining through the mask of indifference that he's wearing.

Upon seeing the contents of the box, the man's brows rise almost to his hairline, and his pupils widen to the point of nearly swallowing up the bluish-green orbs around them. Anyone else in his place most likely would've screamed and flung the box as far away as they could. But just like Hannibal predicted, the sight isn't something that shocks Signor Graham. His reaction is closer to small, mild amusement more than anything remotely resembling terror. It's still a visible reaction, though, and Hannibal savours it like the last meal on earth.

"Giovanni Sogliato's eyes. Really? Is this supposed to be some symbolic bullshit about how I'm finally *seeing* you for who you are?" Signor Graham asks at last. His gaze, that's locked onto Hannibal, turns all shades of unimpressed.

The symbolism hadn't been Hannibal's main intention, although he has to admit that it fits nicely and makes his gesture tastefully poetic. What an *eye-opening gift*, indeed.

The real reason he brought Signor Graham Sogliato's gouged-out eyeballs, neatly packaged into a box, is because it was convenient. Hannibal had harvested them from the traitor's dead body and kept them preserved on ice all this time, just in case he needed hard proof to convince Signor Graham or Uncle Robertus that he is indeed the killer.

All that comes out of Hannibal's mouth, however, is:

"You knew."

"Of course I knew." The way the older man says it is practically the equivalent of him rolling his eyes at Hannibal. "You couldn't have made it more obvious if you had used the guy's fucking arterial spray to write your name on the wall."

Hannibal's eyes narrow. He was careful and made sure nothing about the tableau could be linked back to him or his family.

"I left no eviden—"

"What you left was a scene that *reeked* of admiration," Signor Graham interrupts him. "Of seeking approval and looking to impress."

Hannibal tugs on his bottom lip with his teeth. He had thoroughly erased all evidence, but he didn't feel the need to erase his motivation behind assembling the display. And Signor Graham was able to identify and name that motivation with sniper-like accuracy. Indeed, Hannibal had made his tableau hoping the older man would see it, appreciate the hard work and beauty of it, and acknowledge Hannibal's potential.

What perplexes him, however, is how Signor Graham was able to determine it was him.

"That doesn't explain it. Nobody can draw any meaningful conclusions from that alone. So, how did you know?" he demands, both to ease his confusion and to appear assertive and unafraid to the other man.

Signor Graham can't make claims like this based solely on what he thinks the killer felt at the time. Emotional impressions are not conclusive evidence. Although Signor Graham's deduction is absolutely correct, it's still too big of a leap to make, with no logical links to connect the steps.

"Most people can't. But I can," Signor Graham corrects with a dismissive shrug of his shoulder. "But if you want something more concrete…"

He stills, whiskey tumbler frozen in his hand, and closes his eyes. As if he's watching the scene unfold in his imagination.

"The mutilation was done post-mortem, with surgical precision. The liver and kidneys were removed cleanly, with minimal damage to other organs and visceral matter. You likely cut the stomach open, cleaned out the contents, filled it with coins, and then stitched it back up. Such a specialized skill set really narrows down the number of suspects."

Hannibal can't help a strong sense of pride filling his chest. He feels accomplished now that the other man has recognized the complexity of the surgical procedures he's carried out. It's all that Hannibal wanted — for his work to be seen as valuable.

What he doesn't want, however, is for his work to be seen so valuable that it invites someone to take credit for it. And just like that, the flaming anger is back, burning with the need to confront Signor Graham for his misstep. They've been in this room for a while already, and so far, Hannibal hasn't managed to bring up the topic that truly matters.

"I'm glad that you are impressed with my work. However, there was no need to pass it as yours," he informs the older man sternly.

Signor Graham's eyes snap open, the piercing ice-cold blue in them almost making Hannibal shiver.

"I did what I had to, because you were *reckless*."

The ire brewing inside Hannibal boils over and turns into bravery. The indiscriminate and foolish kind of bravery that doesn't come without consequences. But right now, he can't bring himself to care. He's been disrespected far too much and far too long.

"Reckless how?" he challenges, leaning forward in his seat in a daring manner. "Because I did your job for you?"

As soon as the unwise words leave his mouth, Hannibal knows he crossed the line. He knows he's provoked Signor Graham, and that he's done it on purpose. But no amount of knowing prepares him for the fear that grips his body when the older man swiftly rises from his seat, pushing the chair back with a rough and loud screech. And if earlier, the sharp look in Signor Graham's eyes made Hannibal feel like shivering, the look in them now is sending his body into a full-blown tremor.

Hannibal's mind races, galloping ahead time and thinking of all the possibilities. He can see Signor Graham's fist colliding with his face, then see himself stumbling backwards in pain,

only to be stopped and yanked back by the man's hands around his throat. Hannibal instinctively draws in a sharp exhale, blinking from the sheer impact of the violent vision his mind paints for him.

He stills, bracing for the blow.

Nothing happens.

There is no yelling, no punches, no retaliation. Signor Graham is still standing in the same spot behind the desk, rubbing his temples with his hand and regarding Hannibal with a grim expression.

"Fine, let's pretend you did, then. Did you ask Sogliato who he was working with and why, before you butchered him?" he asks.

Hannibal blinks again, more confused than fearful this time. He was sure his bratty comment was going to earn him the full inferno of the older man's wrath. But instead of putting Hannibal in his place, Signor Graham simply decided to ignore it and move on.

What could be more important to the man, with his sadistic inclinations and all, than taking the opportunity to discipline Hannibal? He's never been shy about getting physical before if he thought Hannibal's behaviour warranted it.

Hannibal takes another wary glance in Signor Graham's direction, who has now started slowly pacing around the room. The older man looks contemplative, lost in thought.

"I asked you a question," he prompts upon noticing Hannibal's eyes on him.

"I didn't really get to talk to him," Hannibal explains, speaking slowly and giving himself time to regain his composure. "It wasn't exactly feasible with the way things went down."

It hadn't even occurred to Hannibal, at any point before or after he killed Sogliato, that he should get more information out of him. He purses his lips, chastising himself for the lack of forethought. And to add further fuel to Hannibal's self-reproach, Signor Graham looks largely unimpressed, too.

"See, this is exactly why you are reckless. You didn't 'do my job', you botched it. How are we going to get to the bottom of this now that you've killed our main lead?"

Signor Graham spreads his hands, a visual representation of just how much he's displeased with Hannibal's actions. And once the realisation of how much he messed things up fully settles in, Hannibal feels like the bottom of his lungs has turned to lead.

What if Signor Graham was working on this long before Hannibal got involved, investigating who else was in on Sogliato's scheme and if it posed a more serious threat than just money theft? And then Hannibal dove in knife-first, spurred on by the small offense against his family, without thinking to consider the big picture. The thought that he may have ruined something big and important with his impulsivity weighs Hannibal's chest down like a tonne of rocks.

“I saw Sogliato give a briefcase to another man at the Uffizi Gallery. That’s how I figured out he might be the traitor,” he tells Signor Graham, hoping this piece of information, no matter how small, will help fix his mess-up.

“Got the man’s name?”

Hannibal bites his lip, confidence plummeting down. “I’m afraid not. But I know he’s blond, tall and lean. And he’s got a curved mustache.”

“Well, that isn’t exactly much to go off, is it?” Signor Graham quips at him.

Without waiting for an answer, he strides towards a liquor cabinet in the corner of the room and begins refilling his whiskey. Ice and glass clatter loudly under his rough, irritated touch. While he’s facing away, Hannibal uses the moment of privacy to collect himself and devise a plan for how to move forward.

So far, the conversation with Signor Graham has not only deviated from the desired course, but escalated into a trainwreck. Hannibal grits his teeth and crosses his arms, realizing that now more than ever, he needs to take the wheel.

Staying silent would only mean he acknowledges his misstep and admits that Signor Graham is right. And that’s not how Hannibal wants to be perceived. Not now, when he is here to force the older man into giving him what he wants, through whatever means necessary.

Signor Graham can preach that playing the long game is smarter and better in the long run all he wants. But at the end of the day, it was Hannibal’s direct method of confronting Sogliato that yielded results. It was him that brought justice to the traitor and defended the honour of his family. It was him that *proved* the Lecters aren’t a force to be reckoned with.

“Do *you* have more information then?” Hannibal asks, a challenge evident in his tone.

Because with the way Signor Graham keeps carrying on, it sounds like he’s got nothing on Sogliato.

“I would have, if you’d let me handle it.”

He turns back to face Hannibal and downs half of his newly-poured drink in one big gulp. Something about him makes Hannibal think of a boss reprimanding his employee who has gone rogue and thereby caused trouble for the whole company. Looking down on Hannibal, seeing him as a useless novice.

Take the wheel, Hannibal, his inner voice demands.

“So, instead you passed my efforts as your own work. Plagiarism is a low move, Signor Graham. Even for you.”

The ice cubes clink in Signor Graham’s glass, reflecting his ice-cold demeanour.

“I was trying to cover for your dumb ass, Hannibal.”

At that, every muscle in Hannibal's body stiffens and stills. Not because he is offended by the words, but because Signor Graham used his first name.

The last time the name dropped from the older man's enticing lips was when Hannibal was sucking him off in the dark bathroom. The way Signor Graham had said it then was sweet, captivating, and full of desire. Turning Hannibal's knees weak and making his heart do a backflip in his chest. And although Hannibal has been dying to hear it again since, the way Signor Graham says it now is the complete opposite of what Hannibal has been dreaming of.

Because it's *patronizing*.

The man is just an inch short of mocking him, reducing him to someone who lacks intelligence and restraint. A misbehaving, impulsive child.

"I don't need your 'cover'," Hannibal practically spits out in response.

In a few lightning-fast strides, Signor Graham is in front of him, their chests almost touching, jabbing his index finger painfully into Hannibal's sternum.

"I cant let you run around leaving bodies everywhere like a fucking self-appointed vigilante. This is politics. Your actions will affect the reputation of the entire family. People are going to ask questions."

Hannibal doesn't bother hiding his vexation. To the point where he chooses to ignore his upbringing that's rooted in respect and politeness, and actually *rolls his eyes* at Signor Graham's words.

Of course it's all about maintaining a clean reputation and keeping the family's dirty work on the down low. Uncle Robertus has always been concerned with their outward image. Paying for blood with blood isn't a priority for him, unless it can be done covertly without affecting how the Lecter family is perceived by the public.

Hannibal suspects this is the main reason why the men that took Mischa and Hannibal's parents from him haven't been punished for their crimes yet. It's all too much goddamn politics and not enough meaningful action. If Hannibal was in charge of the family business — *when* he is in charge — he will show everyone that he is not afraid to spill blood in order to keep people in line. And he won't always outsource it either; he's learned from his altercation with Sogliato that killing with his own hands is far more satisfying and thrilling than ordering someone else to do it.

Now that he's thinking about it, he has another revelation. Is this the very reason Uncle Robertus prohibited Hannibal from seeking mentorship from Signor Graham? Maybe Hannibal's uncle wants him to follow in his own footsteps and become a diplomatic and sensible leader, rather than turn out more like his right-hand man. Maybe there is a reason Uncle Robertus doesn't want Hannibal to learn the language of violence. Because somehow, he can sense that once Hannibal becomes fluent in it, he will be an unstoppable force, famous for his unforgiving wrath and feared for his cruelty.

And nothing fuels Hannibal's desire to pursue Signor Graham more than this does. He widens his stance and squares his shoulders, determined to push on. To remain unflinching, even though the other man is close enough to hurt Hannibal, if he wanted to.

"And how exactly does putting a claim on my work help avoid questions?" Hannibal enquires and steps back, but only so that he doesn't have to tilt his head up to maintain eye contact with Signor Graham.

The distance between them doesn't stay like that for long. The older man takes another step towards Hannibal, coming close again. Menacingly close. Hannibal fails to conceal a little jolt when his backside meets the edge of the desk. *Trapped*.

The same finger that poked Hannibal in the chest is now under his chin, lifting his face up.

"Let's just say that I have a certain kind of reputation," Signor Graham says, quiet enough to almost be a whisper. "Those who don't know me, don't think to question why I do what I do. And those that know me, know better than to open their mouths."

Hannibal shivers, and not entirely in an unpleasant way. A mental image floods his mind, of Signor Graham cutting off someone's tongue for asking too many questions. The man would pop it into his own mouth, chew, and swallow. Fresh blood would stain his lips and teeth a beautiful hue of crimson-red.

An enthralling fantasy, but completely beside the point. Hannibal cants his head back and to the side, removing Signor Graham's finger from under his chin.

"Did it ever occur to you that I *don't want* this to go unnoticed?" he asks.

There is a reason he displayed Sogliato in the way that he did, instead of just getting rid of the body. Hannibal wants recognition.

"And why in the name of hell would you want that?"

Hannibal shrugs, the nonchalance of it fully intentional. "To prove you wrong seems like a good enough reason to me."

He's already thrown his manners out of the window in favour of unleashing his anger, so there is no going back now. Signor Graham had said that Hannibal would weep at the first sight of real blood. And Hannibal dares to believe the man has never been more wrong in his entire life.

Bemusement shines bright on his face when out of all possible reactions, Signor Graham chooses to laugh. A low-pitched melodic chuckle that makes heat pool in Hannibal's lower abdomen.

"If you really wanted to impress me, you'd be on your knees right now."

If they were anywhere else, in any other situation, with any other priorities in mind, Hannibal would have happily obliged. But he is here with a clear purpose, and he won't let anything

distract him. Not even Signor Graham's unfairly attractive body, with its fresh post-shower smell and the stripe of bare chest showing enticingly between the lapels of his bathrobe.

Hannibal shoves him aside and puts distance between them again, his mouth twisting to form a resolute 'No'.

"You don't really think ahead, do you, Hannibal?"

Signor Graham's smooth voice makes Hannibal raise a wary eyebrow.

"What do you mean?"

"*Think* about it. It's obvious that you want revenge on the men that killed your family," Signor Graham says.

Hannibal gives him a small nod, acknowledging that he's right. The older man moves back to his desk in an unhurried fashion, taking a seat and sipping his whiskey before continuing:

"If you broadcast far and wide what you're capable of, they will be waiting for you, prepared. Do you really want them to know that you're coming?"

Hannibal pauses, biting his lip. Signor Graham has a point. Still waters run deep; quiet people are the most dangerous.

He imagines that before Signor Graham established his fearsome reputation, this was exactly how he carried out his first few kills. Hiding behind a facade of a young and slender man, and only letting his victims see the bloodthirsty monster inside once it was too late.

Amidst all the rage, hope sparks in Hannibal's chest when he realizes that what Signor Graham is doing is *giving him advice.* And once he understands the implications of such a generous act, that little glimmer of hope takes over his whole body.

"It seems to me that you are interested in seeing me succeed," Hannibal deduces, careful not to let too much naive optimism slip into his voice.

Signor Graham gives him a noncommittal shrug in response. He places his empty tumbler on the table and runs a hand through his still-damp curls. Trying to act like what he's just revealed to Hannibal isn't a big deal.

Hannibal decides to persevere. "You wouldn't be doing this if you weren't trying to help me."

"There are many reasons why I do what I do."

"And I want to learn." Hannibal grabs the edge of the desk with both his hands and leans over it, into Signor Graham's space. In his most coy and persuasive voice, he adds: "I want you to *teach me, sir*."

It might not work, but he'll be damned if he doesn't try.

And because something *finally* works out for Hannibal, Signor Graham's fingers are back on his chin, tucking into the soft flesh between his neck and jaw, thumb brushing over Hannibal's lips. It's not a definite yes, yet, but it's getting further away from being a no with each passing second.

Before the rational part of his mind can stop him, Hannibal's lips part, sucking the Signor Graham's thumb into his mouth.

The older man lets out a pleased hum and shifts in his seat, causing his bathrobe to open even more, exposing his stomach almost fully. There, in the middle of Signor Graham's pronounced abdominals, is a long scar, running horizontally across his body. Not a superficial scratch, but a deep laceration. A battle scar, no doubt. The scar looks fully healed, so using his surgical knowledge, Hannibal figures it must be several years old.

He can only imagine what happened to the unfortunate bastard that managed to gut Signor Graham like this. They would have met a slow and torturous end, for sure. An abdominal wound of this depth and size could easily be fatal, but more importantly, it's a clear indication Signor Graham let someone get too close to him when he shouldn't have. And for that alone, the person that sank a blade into him deserves a severe punishment.

Hannibal almost wishes that person was still alive, so that he could kill them himself. Despite the fact that his relationship with Signor Graham has had a rough start so far, he can't help but feel protective of the man.

He's brought back into the present moment when Signor Graham pulls his thumb out.

"Here's what I'm going to do. On Tuesday, 5pm sharp, I'm going to come down to the foyer where I met you today," he announces, eyes burning into Hannibal's. "Be there. Because I'll never be this amenable again."

A relieved exhale leaves Hannibal's lips as he nods eagerly. It's the most he can do right now, as he doesn't trust his mouth to speak in fear of blurting out something emotional and embarrassing. The excitement is barely possible to contain.

"Does my uncle know?" he asks then. Because he feels like he has to say something. "About everything."

Signor Graham's eyes flash. "What did I just tell you about asking questions?"

Those that know me know better than to open their mouths.

Hannibal casts his eyes down, demure.

"Noted, sir." And because he feels like expressing gratitude would go a long way here, he adds, "Thank you".

The older man offers Hannibal a pleased smile and stands up. Without even realizing it, Hannibal mirrors his movements.

"Now, it's getting late. You should be on your way."

Hannibal doesn't object. Every cell in his body feels like it's on fire, sparkling with joy because he's finally getting what he wants. There will be no stopping his triumphant smiling and laughter when he shares the good news with Chiyoh later today. For now, however, Hannibal schools his face into a more reserved smile and lets himself be led out of the room and down the hallway.

He pauses at the top of the staircase, offering a parting handshake to the other man.

"*Buonanotte*, Signor Graham. I will see you on Tuesday."

"Good night. Oh and Hannibal, a brief note for the future." There is a smile on Signor Graham's face, too, but it's more enigmatic. With a little hint of smugness. "My eyes are up here."

"I wasn't — !" Hannibal protests immediately, completely taken aback by what the man is insinuating.

"Weren't you?" Signor Graham questions, the expression evolving from smug to cocky. "The entire time we spoke, you were staring at my body, licking your lips and crossing your legs like a teenager about to have a wet dream."

Hannibal can't deny he's been checking the older man out all evening, captivated by the little display of that stunning torso as much as by the rest of Signor Graham's handsome appearance. But he was certain he was doing it without being obvious.

"I'd suggest either keeping your desires in check or mustering up the balls to ask for what you want."

Hannibal only blinks at him in response, his mind too stunned to think of an appropriate reply. He opens his mouth, praying that something either witty or flirty comes out, but Signor Graham quietens him with a look that translates to you-missed-your-chance.

"Go now," is what he says to Hannibal.

So, for the lack of a better thing to do or say, Hannibal leaves. As his feet carry him out of the house and into his car, he internally curses himself. The invitation from Signor Graham was *right there,* plain and obvious, but he was too slow to take it.

Next time.

Because now he knows for a fact that there will be one. Tuesday, 5pm.

Hannibal has to sacrifice his weekly renaissance painting class for this, but he can't bring himself to truly care. There are few things he wouldn't willingly give up for this mentorship with Signor Graham.

In fact, the painting class coinciding with their next meeting is a blessing in disguise, because it means Hannibal's aunt and uncle won't be wondering where he is. Now, he just needs to convince Franklyn to drive him to Signor Graham's residence instead of the fine arts

academy. But in the grand scheme of things, it will be much easier to achieve compared to what Hannibal accomplished today. Franklyn is relatively easy to influence into cooperation.

The hardest, most unpleasant part is now done. What is in store for Hannibal now is a clear road to success under Signor Graham's invaluable guidance.

And he can't wait to begin.

Chapter End Notes

I appreciate every bookmark, subscription, kudos and hit, but comments are the bane of my existence. If you like the story and/or have something specific in mind that you'd like to see in the future chapters, let me know! <3

The Preparation

Chapter Summary

> “May I make a suggestion?” Hannibal asks.
>
> Signor Graham glances at him, mildly amused. “Go ahead.”
>
> “When I win a round, can I start calling you Will?”
>
> It’s a bold request, and definitely unexpected too. Hannibal is raising the stakes before the game has even begun.

Chapter Notes

> This chapter isn't very action-heavy but more of a character development chapter. Hannibal learns about Will's empathy (sort of), Murasaki is a wine aunt, and Franklyn is a single dad with an eye for one Tobias Budge.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Hannibal?”

“Yes, auntie?”

Hannibal stops on his way past the main lounge room. Aunt Murasaki is sprawled on a chaise longue by the fire with hair rollers in her long black hair, waiting for her freshly-pedicured toenails to dry.

“I have exciting news for you,” she says after taking a sip from her wine glass.

There is an entire bottle of Chianti Classico on the coffee table next to her, and Hannibal can tell his aunt is having one of those ‘wine and self-pampering’ nights. Aunt Murasaki’s white long-haired Turkish angora cat, Dante, is curled up in her lap, enjoying the warmth of the fire.

“Yeah?”

“I have invited some people for dinner on Wednesday in a couple of weeks. I know it’s your kitchen night, and I thought you’d be delighted to get to cook for someone other than just us.”

Hannibal smiles at her. Having a wider audience to taste and appraise his culinary skills is something he enjoys greatly. Aunt Murasaki knows him well.

“I’d love to, yeah. Who’s coming?” he asks, only half-interested in the answer.

Hannibal doesn’t care as much about who the guests are as what they think of his food. Uncle Robertus and Aunt Murasaki have many friends and acquaintances, and he can’t keep up with them all. Hannibal is fully prepared to say goodnight to his aunt and continue walking back to his room. That is, until he hears what she says next.

“Just Bill Graham and his son.”

Interest now piqued, Hannibal decides to stay. He plucks a second wine glass from the liquor cabinet in the corner of the room and settles in an armchair next to Aunt Murasaki. Cooking for family friends is great, but cooking for Signor Graham would be… a privilege above the rest.

“That’s lovely,” he comments, visibly pleased. “Any particular occasion?”

It’s not uncommon for Aunt Murasaki and Uncle Robertus to have people over for dinner. However, growing up, Hannibal wasn’t allowed to attend most of them. He assumes it’s because business was discussed at those particular events, and as per the family rules, such conversations are for adults only.

“I thought it’s been a while since we’ve seen the Grahams properly. Every time they come by it’s about work,” Aunt Murasaki sighs and waves the hand that’s holding her half-empty glass.

Even before Hannibal officially joined the family business, he knew that his aunt seldom attends the meetings held in Uncle Robertus’s office. She knows everything that happens and has her say in the matters if she feels it’s necessary, but for the most part, she prefers to let Uncle Robertus handle the business and devote her time to the finer things in life, such as art and music.

“It’s time we had a social night. Great company, beautiful food, and strictly no work-talk,” Aunt Murasaki continues.

Everyone who knows her can tell exactly where Hannibal got his appreciation for aesthetics from. It was Aunt Murasaki who cultivated and encouraged the love for artistic hobbies in Hannibal, ever since he was little. While Uncle Robertus’s priority has been to ensure Hannibal receives the best education in the country, Aunt Murasaki has always been more concerned with extracurricular activities. Hannibal doesn’t remember a time under her care when he hasn’t had at least one art class and one piano class per week.

“That’s a great idea. It would be nice to get to know Signor Graham and his father better,” Hannibal replies, working hard to keep his voice even and conceal his excitement.

God, Aunt Murasaki is a *gift*.

“Work can just be *so consuming* sometimes,” she complains. “I’ve been trying to convince the Grahams to join us at the opera for months, but they keep saying they’re too busy. Especially Will.” She shakes her head in a gesture laden with disapproval. The alcohol makes the pitch of her voice and her body language more dramatic than they already are. “That boy knows nothing but work!”

Hannibal finds it particularly amusing that his aunt calls Signor Graham a ‘boy’, even though the man doesn’t look a day younger than 30.

He smiles at her in a conspiratory fashion and leans in as if he’s telling a secret. “I’ll help you convince them to come.”

It’s for his own gain for the most part, of course, but the act of helping Aunt Murasaki gives Hannibal a certain sense of fondness, too. Visiting the opera as a family has been the highlight of his younger years, and still continues to be. And having Signor Graham join them would make it even better.

Hannibal thinks back to his last interaction with Signor Graham, where the man had hinted that Hannibal should “ask for what he wants”. His cheeks heat up as he imagines what they could get up to if he was brave enough to do so. The private box his family usually hires is dark and spacious enough that no one would notice… Or perhaps they could sneak off during intermission.

Chiyoh could cover for them by making up some reason for their absence. But that means he would have to tell Chiyoh that he’s been intimately involved with his uncle’s right-hand man in the first place. Hannibal doesn’t imagine her reaction would be very mild.

He’ll cross that bridge when he gets to it.

“It would do young Graham good,” Aunt Murasaki says with a nod, accepting Hannibal’s offer of help in dragging the Grahams to the opera.

The nod is more like a heavy bob of her head as her movements are gradually getting sloppier because of the alcohol. Hannibal glances at the half-empty wine bottle, deciding to take the risk and steer the conversation where he wants to.

“I can tell you care about him a lot,” he observes, casual and conversational. When in reality, it’s anything but.

“I can’t help feeling maternal,” Aunt Murasaki explains in a deeply sympathetic tone. “I’ve watched him grow up without a mother, and I can tell it’s been tough.”

Curiosity takes over Hannibal, wanting to know what happened to Signor Graham’s mom. He thinks about his own mother too, about the horrific fate that befell her, and wonders if Signor Graham has been through a similar experience. Before he gets a chance to ask, his aunt speaks again:

“No wonder he’s turning out just like his father.”

Disapproval is evident in her voice, accompanied by a pinch of annoyance. She waves her hand holding the wine glass so animatedly that the deep burgundy liquid almost spills out. Hannibal's curiosity switches direction, picking up that Aunt Murasaki seems to have a thing or two to say about Signor Graham Senior's parenting methods.

"Is that bad?" he enquires delicately.

"Not necessarily, I suppose. Will is good at what he does, a real asset to our family. But I do think that having a more varied upbringing would've been good for him."

Perhaps there are more similarities between Hannibal and Signor Graham than could be seen by a naked eye. It seems that both their father figures, Uncle Robertus and Bill Graham, have focused on fostering only traits that make one a good businessman and leader; strength of character, level-headedness, and pragmatism.

However, growing up around his aunt meant that Hannibal had someone to cultivate a more expressive and sensitive side of him, too. Aunt Murasaki, who has a deep appreciation of aesthetics, beauty, and inner harmony, has taught Hannibal to be in tune with his emotions and excel at personal relationships. She is quite progressive in her views too, in contrast to Uncle Robertus who is more conservative. As such, Hannibal has hopes that she would be accepting of his sexuality if he ever came out to her. Maybe some day.

Based on what she has said about Signor Graham's past, he didn't have such varied influences growing up. Hannibal can't help but think that might be the reason he isn't married to a woman despite being at the prime age to do so. Not that he knows for sure that Signor Graham isn't out to his family or the wider community, but his hesitancy to let Hannibal suck him off the first time seems to suggest so.

Hannibal refills his and Aunt Murasaki's glass. The conversation is only just getting started.

"How so?" he prompts her again, this time to get confirmation that his deductions about Signor Graham are correct.

"Will's been trained in his father's trade since he was young. No other career paths were considered, nor growth in any other aspect," Aunt Murasaki goes on in a wine-fuelled dramatic complaining tone. "Which is a big shame because he's such a smart boy. So emotionally intelligent. A beautiful soul."

It's unusual to hear someone use words like 'emotional' or 'beautiful' to describe Signor Graham, the man who has the most blood on his hands out of everyone Hannibal's ever met. Yet, Aunt Murasaki seems certain that Signor Graham has a gentler side to him. That he isn't just an remorseless executioner who enjoys every chance to feed his sadistic inclinations.

If he is truly as "emotionally intelligent" as his aunt says, then how is it possible that he was so wrong regarding Hannibal's capacity for violence? Could it be that he lied to Hannibal, concealing what he really saw?

Hannibal's hand that's holding his glass freezes mid-air, halfway to his mouth. This must be it; the exact reason there are fearful whispers exchanged about Signor Graham, the reason he

is regarded as a whole different kind of dangerous. A man who can read his opponent's feelings and motivations like an open book and use that knowledge against them is far more threatening than a man who's simply wielding a weapon.

The more Hannibal thinks about it, the more he becomes certain that when Signor Graham looked at him that time in the courtyard, he truly *saw* him. For everything that Hannibal is. Every strength and every weakness, every worry and every aspiration. And the most concerning thing is that he felt more exposed in that moment than he would've felt standing in front of Signor Graham completely naked.

Hannibal takes a big gulp of wine, uncertain how he feels about being seen in such a way. He is distracted from his musings when Aunt Murasaki's cat suddenly jumps off her lap and saunters elsewhere.

Hannibal watches the cat go with an expression of pure indifference. Pets are temperamental like that and can make a mess, which is often jarring to someone like him who values cleanliness and order. This is why he doesn't let Dante into his room. Hannibal much prefers his Dante resting on his bookshelf among other poets than running around shedding hair everywhere.

"Dante! You'll smudge my nail polish," Aunt Murasaki wails, and Hannibal can tell she's getting increasingly intoxicated.

Alcohol is a wonderful tool when one is after specific information.

"Does Signor Graham have any interests? Apart from you know… the business," Hannibal asks, bringing them back to the topic that matters. Then, as an afterthought, he adds: "I'm only asking so I can talk to him at the dinner. Get him interested in the opera."

He says it just in case Aunt Murasaki has retained her perceptiveness despite her drunkenness. But judging by the scheming and largely lopsided smile she gives him, she hasn't.

"Good thinking." She pauses then, needing to think hard before answering Hannibal's question. A glance at her now cat-less lap seems to spark a memory in her head. "Will has a soft spot for pets. He always picks up and pets Dante when he comes over."

Hannibal nods, remembering the dog bed in the man's office. He has read enough about the psychology of killers to know that most of them begin their descent into cruelty by hurting animals. However, Signor Graham doesn't seem to fit this mold. And it makes him even more fascinating to Hannibal.

"I'll keep that in mind," he tells Aunt Murasaki.

He always makes sure to cook up a feast for his family on his kitchen nights, but this time, he is going to make the dinner extra special. It'll be the prime opportunity to get closer to Signor Graham. Closer to *Will*.

Hannibal glances at the big antique clock in the corner, shifting in his seat. The chat with his aunt has yielded a lot of precious information and revelations about Signor Graham, and he doesn't want to burden her more than necessary.

"It's getting late. Let me help you to your bedroom," he offers.

Aunt Murasaki doesn't seem so drunk that she can't walk, but he figures that it's better to be safe.

"I'm alright, darling," she assures him. "You go to sleep, you've got classes early in the morning, don't you?"

Hannibal nods and scoops up the empty bottle and glasses to put away.

"Good night, Hannibal," Aunt Murasaki wishes, already on her way upstairs.

"Good night, auntie."

***

On Tuesday, at 3:40pm sharp, exactly one hour and twenty minutes before he's meant to meet Signor Graham, Hannibal opens the door of the Bentley and gets in.

"Hello, Franklyn."

"Good afternoon, Hannibal."

The chauffeur seems to be in a good mood, which is exactly what Hannibal needs today. What he is about to ask Franklyn is an unusual request, something that is likely to make the older man nervous. Hannibal needs to tread carefully and set the scene, so to speak. Part of it is priming Franklyn psychologically to accept his request, before he voices it.

"How did Sophia do on her exams?" Hannibal asks, buckling himself in.

Franklyn has a teenage daughter, Sophia, whom Hannibal tutors in Italian and English. He can tell that Franklyn loves her a lot and wants her to have the best possible future, which includes making sure she gets good grades and can get into a prestigious university. Being a single dad isn't easy, so Hannibal offers to tutor Sophia in his spare time. It's more to make Franklyn feel compelled to repay him than out of the goodness of his heart. However, what Franklyn doesn't know can't hurt him.

Hannibal and Sophia get along well. They are both interested in arts and languages and share life experiences such as growing up without a mother. Sophia's mom is still alive, but she and Franklyn divorced a few years ago. Franklyn has moved on now, and if Hannibal's gut feeling is right, Tobias Budge has been more than just a sympathetic acquaintance to him, offering company and a shoulder to cry on. What Franklyn and Tobias have now is very close

friendship, or perhaps something more. Hannibal doesn't know, and it's really none of his business either. Keeping the exact nature of their relationship private is certainly a wise move on Tobias and Franlyn's part, especially considering Uncle Robertus's less-than-ideal attitudes towards homosexuality.

"She got an A on both! Couldn't have done it without you," Franklyn says with a wide smile that's full of pride.

Hannibal mirrors the joyful expression on his face. "Please pass on my congratulations."

It's nice to hear about Sophia's success, but it isn't the reason Hannibal brought her up.

"Franklyn, can I make an odd request?"

The older man's eyes look him up and down, curious. Without waiting for him to reply, Hannibal continues:

"Can you take me to this address instead of my painting class?"

He offers Franklyn a piece of paper with an address scribbled onto it in Hannibal's neat oblique handwriting. The man's eyebrows rise as he recognises the location.

"This is… Signor Graham's residence," he states slowly, slight confusion evident on his face.

"Yes. I have a meeting with him."

"Oh... I wasn't aware."

"It was a bit of a last minute thing." Hannibal waves his hand dismissively, deliberately downplaying the importance of said meeting.

It would be best to let Franklyn think that there is nothing suspicious about Hannibal going to visit Signor Graham when he's supposed to be in his renaissance painting class. But he can't risk Franklyn running his mouth and accidentally spilling the information to Uncle Robertus. Signor Graham had warned Hannibal against asking whether his uncle knows about their meeting, so Hannibal can only assume that Uncle Robertus is still in the dark. And he intends to keep things that way too, for as long as possible.

"Can I count on your discretion about my whereabouts?" Hannibal asks, voice quiet but firm.

Franklyn hesitates, averting his eyes. The secrecy is certainly making him feel wary about getting involved, in case it will lead to trouble. But Hannibal has helped his daughter, and now Franklyn has the opportunity to help him in return. Hannibal smiles to himself as the sense of obligation pushes Franklyn in the desired direction.

"Alright," Franklyn says, fingers rubbing the steering wheel in a fidgety fashion. "When should I pick you up?"

“Don’t worry about it. I’ll get a cab.”

The look in Franklyn’s eyes screams “an hour-long cab ride will cost you a fortune”, but the man himself says nothing. This is starting to look increasingly sketchy, and Hannibal hopes Franklyn doesn’t ask any more questions and keeps his promise of silence. He flashes the man a grateful and genuine smile.

“Thank you, Franklyn.”

***

At twenty minutes to five, Franklyn and the Bentley are long gone, and Hannibal is standing in the driveway of the Graham residence. Hesitating. Overthinking.

He can’t make up his mind about whether to go in early and make his presence known, thereby showing Signor Graham that he is enthusiastic about this meeting. Being early means getting to spend more time in the house too, even if he’s just sitting around waiting. Hannibal is excited to jump on any opportunity to explore more of Signor Graham’s home. Peeking into his safe haven, the place where the man is in his own element, is like peeking into his mind.

However, maybe it would be best to wait out here and approach the house just before 5pm? Hannibal doesn’t want to risk appearing overly eager or nosy. He eventually settles on the middle ground; waiting here until ten to five and then going to the door.

Predictably, Signora Madchen opens the door to let him in. She isn’t surprised to see Hannibal this time, which means Signor Graham must have notified her beforehand. She asks if Hannibal would prefer to wait on the comfortable couch in the living room, which he politely declines. Signor Graham specifically said that they would meet in the foyer, and Hannibal wants to show from the very start that he is a good student; someone that listens carefully and follows instructions to a T.

At exactly 5 o’clock — not a minute earlier or later, just like Hannibal expected — Signor Graham appears at the top of the staircase. He is dressed casually and comfortably, much like the last time Hannibal visited. Instead of the bathrobe, he is wearing a blue and green plaid flannel and loose khaki pants. His hair is an unruly bundle of brown curls that bounce freely as he moves, falling over his forehead and framing his face like a dark halo. Signor Graham’s entire appearance is a refreshing change to the strict and formal outfits he chooses to wear to Uncle Robertus’s meetings.

Hannibal doesn’t know what to make of the fact that the man doesn’t seem to care much about how he looks for their session. Knowing Signor Graham, it could either mean that he considers them to be close enough not to need to dress up, or it could mean that he doesn’t care enough about Hannibal to bother dressing up for him. Hannibal hopes for the former, but either way, he likes the more casual look on Signor Graham.

“Evening, Hannibal.”

“Buonasera, Signor Graham.”

Hannibal takes a step towards the staircase, assuming he should be joining the older man upstairs, like the last time. However, Signor Graham begins descending down the stairs with a brisk and determined pace, so Hannibal decides to stay put.

“How is your family?” he asks. Most likely out of politeness than anything else.

“Very good, thank you. And yours?” Hannibal doesn’t mind. Manners are important. “We are expecting you and your father for dinner next week, it seems.”

“So I've been told.”

“It will be my pleasure to cook for you,” Hannibal informs him, pride evident in his voice.

Signor Graham raises an eyebrow. “Oh? I didn’t know you cook.”

Hannibal didn’t bring up the dinner just for small talk reasons; he’s interested to see Signor Graham’s reaction. He’s managed to surprise and impress the man once already with his elaborate murder tableau, and quickly developed a taste for it. If not an addiction.

Hannibal smiles to himself. “I’m passionate about culinary arts.”

There is no doubt that he will surprise Signor Graham with his cooking, too.

“I look forward to it. Now, follow me.”

He starts walking down one of the hallways, Hannibal in his wake. At the end of it, there is another staircase, leading down underground. The little chit-chat and exchanging pleasantries was to be expected, but Hannibal thought Signor Graham would offer him tea or coffee before getting “down to business”, so to speak. This is what Uncle Robertus always does, anyway. Every guest is offered light refreshments shortly after their arrival. It’s part of the Lecters’ exemplary hospitality.

Maybe outside of Uncle Robertus’s expectations, Signor Graham isn’t so big on manners, Hannibal thinks. Or maybe he simply doesn't want them to eat or drink anything right before strenuous physical activity, as it leads to poor digestion. Hannibal finds himself overthinking again. He bites his lip and flexes his fingers, using the sensations to ground him in the present moment. It’s not that he’s nervous, he’s just...

Well, no point in denying it. He *is* nervous.

At the bottom of the stairs is a heavy door with an elaborate digital lock, which Signor Graham opens by putting in a keycode. Hannibal’s curiosity skyrockets. Whatever is behind the door must be important. He wonders if Signora Madchen and other servants are allowed down here, or if Signor Graham is the only person with access.

When they enter the basement, Hannibal's hungry eyes immediately take in every detail in front of him. They're in a large and cool space with dark grey brick walls, devoid of windows and natural light. There are several subsections, separated by more walls and doors. The biggest section is the open space in the middle, where half the floor is smooth linoleum and the other half is covered with large gym-style mats. The room reminds Hannibal of Sensei Du Maurier's dojo, and he figures it must be the main area for fighting practice. Except that Hannibal can immediately spot a few elements that make it clear this isn't just a regular martial arts room.

On the walls, there are several target boards, like dart boards but bigger, some of them vaguely the shape of a human silhouette. Two knives are stuck in one of them, marking the middle of the head and chest. To the left of the practice space is a corner lined with shelves and metal cabinets, exhibiting a wide variety of firearms, blades, and every other kind of weapon imaginable.

Judging by the size of the Graham mansion, the basement is big enough to include more subsections that Hannibal can't see from where he is standing. He is itching to see more, but knows better than to go exploring without permission.

"My father built this place when he was young," Signor Graham tells him. "But I've made some additions over the years."

Hannibal can tell that despite the dark and dangerous atmosphere of the room, Signor Graham is comfortable here.

"Very impressive," he responds, looking around with an appreciative nod. "Looks like the perfect place for training."

"Among other things."

Knowing the nature of the work Signor Graham does, Hannibal can think of a few more uses for a secure and soundproofed place like this. However, he keeps that deduction to himself.

He doesn't waste any more time gawking at things, aware that the duration of their training session could be very limited. Hannibal takes off his jacket, hangs it on the hanger by the door, and leaves his bag next to it. He made sure to dress appropriately, in a black slim-fit shirt and pants, made of material that is breathable and easy to move in.

Starting with a warm-up routine seems like a logical idea, so Hannibal begins lightly bouncing on the spot while rolling his shoulders to get his blood flowing and muscles ready for action.

"What are you going to teach me?" he asks, switching to rotating his extended arms.

"We'll start with some sparring. I want to see your baseline skillset."

Hannibal nods, secretly pleased. And a little relieved, too. He is vastly experienced in karate, which is all about sparring with an opponent. This means he won't be on fully unfamiliar

ground and will hopefully be able to use his well-practised techniques to impress Signor Graham. He is thankful they aren't starting with weapons, as he isn't as confident with them.

Empowered by the way things are going, Hannibal speaks up:

"May I make a suggestion?"

Signor Graham glances at him, mildly amused. "Go ahead."

"When I win a round, can I start calling you Will?"

It's a bold request, and definitely unexpected too. Hannibal is raising the stakes before the game has even begun.

His common sense is telling him that this is a mistake, that he is delusional for thinking he could take on an experienced killer like Signor Graham. Still, Hannibal refuses to feel intimidated. It's more than likely that he's going to lose numerous sparring rounds before even coming close to winning, but it's all part of the learning process. The reward Hannibal is setting for himself will give him additional motivation to succeed.

The amusement on Signor Graham's face grows. It's not the condescending kind, but rather entertained by Hannibal's bravery.

"*If* you win. The biggest mistake rookies make is underestimating their opponent."

Hannibal ignores being called a rookie, preoccupied with the realisation that Signor Graham didn't explicitly say no to his suggestion. It makes him feel victorious already. Being seen as Signor Graham's equal is what Hannibal wants more than anything.

It's practically a given that he's going to end up on his back on the mats, defeated, at least a dozen times. But in the end, it will all be worth it.

Chapter End Notes

Comments and feedback are appreciated, as always! ❤

The Training

Chapter Summary

> “Rule number one. If you fail to follow my instructions, our arrangement is off,” Signor Graham says, pacing idly around the large practice space. He passes the big person-shaped target board on the wall, pulls out the two knives that are stuck in it, and puts them away.
>
> Hannibal nods. “Yes, sir.”
>
> “No weapons, for now. Just hands and feet.”

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Signor Graham’s glacier eyes are drilling into Hannibal. Testing him. Seeing what he’s made of. They’re in the training basement, all warmed up and ready to dive into the sparring practice.

“Rule number one. If you fail to follow my instructions, our arrangement is off,” Signor Graham says, pacing idly around the large practice space.

He passes the big person-shaped target board on the wall, pulls out the two knives that are stuck in it, and puts them away.

Hannibal nods. “Yes, sir.”

“No weapons, for now. Just hands and feet.”

Hannibal nods again. He takes a deep breath, then exhales slowly through the nose. He tries to tell himself that this is just like the examinations for the next belt in karate. It’s nothing he hasn’t experienced before. He’s perfected his techniques, and now he just needs to show them to the teacher. Except that this time, the ‘teacher’ is a trained killer who isn’t going to go easy on Hannibal, if the fact that he enjoyed humiliating Hannibal is anything to go by.

And, well, Hannibal enjoyed it too. But that was in the context of intimacy, when he was on his knees in front of Signor Graham’s crotch. This time is different. If Hannibal gets distracted by the older man’s alluring aura, he’s going to have his ass handed to him in no time.

He just needs to focus, pay attention, and remember all the martial arts skills he’s learned over the years. He can do this.

“Any questions?” Signor Graham asks.

He looks completely relaxed, and there is even a lazy smirk on his face. Signor Graham probably thinks that beating Hannibal at sparring practice is going to be child’s play. However, considering that Hannibal has become an equal, if not a more competent opponent, to Sensei Du Maurier, he knows that he’s more skilled than he looks. He mightn’t win against Signor Graham, not right away, but he will certainly put up a commendable fight.

Signor Graham steps into the middle of the practice space and shoots Hannibal an expectant glance. Oh, right. He’s supposed to answer the question.

“No,” Hannibal replies, rolling his shoulders to shake off the tension.

Signor Graham rolls up the sleeves of his blue and green plaid flannel, baring his toned forearms. His unstyled curly hair is falling on his forehead and partially obstructing his eyes, but even then, Hannibal can see that they are watching him attentively. Even though the man appears at ease, he’s always watching. Always ready.

“Go on then.”

The words force Hannibal to stop looking at Signor Graham’s captivating appearance - especially those refined arms - and focus on the task at hand.

When sparring, direct attack has always been one of his strongest points. Hannibal doesn’t waste time approaching his opponents slowly and trying to predict their strengths and weaknesses before making his plan of attack. He’s the opposite, striking fast and hard, using the element of surprise to his advantage and taking his competitor by storm. His strategy with Signor Graham is no different.

Hannibal lunges.

He throws in a couple of strong punches straight off the bat. The other man dodges them, but the poorly-concealed expression of surprise on his face doesn’t go unnoticed by Hannibal. It’s not really a victory, but it propels Hannibal onwards. He goes for a roundhouse kick next - Sensei Du Maurier has always said that his kicks are extraordinary - aiming to hit Signor Graham in the ribs.

Well, trying to, anyway.

Before he knows it, the world around him spins, and he is flat on his back on the mat. When did Signor Graham even manage to flip him like that? The older man is still standing, and Hannibal doesn’t need it spelled out to him that he’s lost this round.

“Interesting strategy,” Signor Graham observes, “however, what you’re doing becomes very obvious after the first couple of minutes. And therefore, it becomes useless.”

Hannibal stares back, tasting bitterness on his tongue even though there’s been no blood so far. He knew he would most likely lose, but it still hurts his pride.

“How so?” he asks.

Signor Graham extends out his hand, which Hannibal grabs to pull himself back onto his feet. The man's palm is soft and warm, held out in a gesture of goodwill and respect, and Hannibal has an impulse to use his grip on it to throw Signor Graham on the ground, evening the score. But that would be dishonourable and outright *rude* . Besides, he is curious to hear what the older man has to say about his strategy.

"You started off strong, because first impressions are the most memorable. You're trying to intimidate your opponent and make them think you're stronger than you actually are. Which is more of a psychological trick than a show of real combat skills."

Hannibal shrugs, his pride promptly rebuilding itself after the initial crack. "It gets results."

"I'm sure it does," Signor Graham agrees, but not without a note of smugness. "In a street fight."

You're no match to a professional fighter, is what the man is really saying. Hannibal chooses not to respond to the provocation; Signor Graham hasn't seen half of what he is capable of yet. Instead, Hannibal resumes his previous starting position on the mats, inviting the other man for another round.

It ends much like the first one, with him on the floor again within minutes, and Signor Graham still on his feet, looking like he's barely spent any effort. The only thing that remotely suggests the man has been physically active at all is the slight layer of sweat glistening near his hairline, giving his skin a beautiful glow.

Focus, Hannibal.

He manages to get in a punch in the third round, and another punch and a kick in the fourth. It always takes a while to get to know a new opponent and see the weak points in their technique, but the more times Hannibal gets up after being flipped onto the floor, the more he finds himself improving.

Signor Graham's fighting style doesn't strictly follow any of the existing martial arts, but rather borrows bits and pieces from various styles. It makes him a more valuable partner to practise with, and a more dangerous man to face in a real battle, because you never know what will come next.

Hannibal is pleased to notice that his efforts have finally caused Signor Graham to break into a proper sweat. He discards his flannel, revealing a fitted white undershirt. It complements his refined biceps and pectorals almost unfairly well, by clinging to the skin and accentuating every curve of the lithe muscles.

And the fact that it's up to Hannibal now to make the next move, to "be brave enough to ask for what he wants", as Signor Graham has put it, doesn't help matters in the slightest.

For the love of god, Hannibal, focus.

Distractions like that are embarrassing at best and fatal at worst. Hannibal learns it first-hand when he ends up pushed flat onto his stomach on the ground, with Signor Graham's foot

pressing between his shoulder blades. They're nearing the score of 10-0 with the older man winning, and the numbers are starting to feel humiliating to Hannibal. Signor Graham is far, far more advanced than him in hand-to-hand combat, making it painfully clear that Hannibal isn't going to win a single round if he relies just on his martial arts skills.

He has to fight smarter, not harder.

Signor Graham's technique is like clockwork, dodging and blocking Hannibal's moves practically as soon as he thinks of them. So to disrupt that near mechanical flow of arms and legs, Hannibal needs to do something to grind the man's gears.

"You're good at fighting, I get it," he huffs between rounds. "But that doesn't cancel out the fact that you're a poser."

Signor Graham's eyes immediately flick to him. "Excuse me?"

"You heard me. You're a poser. Living off your dad's reputation and my family's money. Who knows where you'd be without it?"

The older man's glacier-cold eyes narrow and flash, showing surprise and displeasure at Hannibal's sudden boldness. The sudden *rudeness* . Which is exactly what Hannibal wants.

"If you're really as dangerous as people say you are…" he lunges forward, swinging his fists and trying to land punches wherever possible, "...then why are men that took my parents and Mischa still alive?"

The loss of his loved ones and the burning need for revenge add more purpose to Hannibal's strikes, more strength to his movements. He keeps advancing at Signor Graham, undeterred, making the man work hard to stay out of those fists' way. He's still not letting Hannibal truly hit him, but Hannibal can see that his defenses are getting sloppier, hindered by the emotional response the words have evoked.

"They're alive because you're too scared to go after them," Hannibal continues between throwing blows and kicks at Signor Graham like there's no tomorrow. "The same way you're scared to go after the people that took your mom."

Hannibal doesn't know it for sure, but he has his suspicions based on certain notes he found when breaking into Uncle Robertus's office to look through his things. And even if he's wrong about Signor Graham's mother it doesn't matter, because his goal isn't to dig through the man's family history. It's to make him lose his composure.

Strong emotions are a weakness when left uncontrolled. They're a distraction, and in combat, any distraction, regardless of how small, can be a matter of victory or defeat. Life or death. And Hannibal doesn't see any other ways to get under Signor Graham's skin except this.

He stares at the beast that he's lured out of hiding, using all he's got to resist the instinct to flee. There is a dark aura surrounding Signor Graham now, like he's Satan's disciple powered by the black magic straight from the underworld. The air between them is thick with the

man's anger, making Hannibal's insides tremble. And still, he sucks in a deep breath and refuses to back down.

"Now more than one person has died because of your cowardice," he seethes, pouncing onto Signor Graham again, ready to deliver a sharp and painful right hook.

When the man grabs Hannibal, it's not to flip him onto the floor like before, but pin him against the wall. Hannibal grunts when his back comes roughly in contact with the brick surface, but because his hands are still free, he prepares to use them immediately to push Signor Graham off. What stops him is a cold and sharp sensation against his neck. It can't be, but it's unmistakable.

Signor Graham is holding a blade to his throat.

"You don't know a damn thing about what happened to my mom," he growls, face inches from Hannibal's.

Signor Graham is so close that Hannibal can feel his body heat, burning him like hellfire. He'd be undeniably aroused if he weren't so stunned and caught off guard.

"You said no weapons," Hannibal stammers out in response. His voice sounds like a pathetic squeak, apprehension dialled up a thousand-fold now that their sparring practice has escalated into something *real*.

"Doesn't matter what I said," the older man dismisses, eyeing Hannibal coldly and making no move to release him. "This is no little kids' karate club. Rules don't apply when you're in a real fight."

Hannibal doesn't hide how affronted he feels. He probably couldn't even if he tried. The Lecter family has always been all about honour and keeping their word, even when it comes to their enemies. Naturally, Hannibal assumed these principles would apply to Signor Graham's conduct too. But alas, it's evident that he's been mistaken. Hannibal feels cheated on by the man's actions, to the point where his chest is threatening to burst from all the pent-up injustice.

"I thought we were meant to be practising. This is unfair," he huffs, shifting uncomfortably under the older man's hold.

In addition to feeling wronged, Hannibal feels like a total idiot. He watched with his own eyes as Signor Graham plucked the knife off the wall at the start of their session. He should've paid attention to where that knife was the entire time. He should've expected this.

"Unfair, huh? It's what real life is." Signor Graham's tone is scalding, like he's laughing at Hannibal's naivety. "Use whatever you can get your hands on, or they're gonna cut into you like a Thanksgiving turkey."

He lets his knife-holding hand drop and pulls away, getting back into the middle of the room. Despite being free and uninjured, Hannibal feels like he's been hit by a train. His chest is tight and his lungs are burning, the unfairness of it all being just one of the rocks in the pile

weighing him down. He watches silently as Signor Graham readjusts his grip on the knife and flings it towards the wall on the opposite side of the room, making it hit the bullseye of the target board.

With the weapon now out of the game, they're back to having no unfair advantages. Or so it seems. Hannibal came here to learn from an esteemed mentor, but all he's learned so far is that Signor Graham fights dirty and should never be trusted.

"We're taking a break," the older man announces suddenly.

He's now just as sweaty as Hannibal, damp hair sticking to his forehead. Signor Graham points in the direction of an ajar door that looks like it has a small kitchenette behind it.

"Go make me a coffee."

Hannibal blinks at him, dumbfounded. "I'm not a maid."

"Then why do you fight like one? Black, no milk, one sugar. Go."

His curt tone leaves no room for argument. Hannibal's bones fill with anger, followed by mortification. Signor Graham has not only cheated in a fight, but is now humiliating him and treating him like a servant rather than a sparring partner worthy of respect. Maybe Hannibal brought it onto himself by provoking and insulting the older man, but it's still incredibly petty.

He wants to argue and tell Signor Graham to go make his own damn coffee. But then, he remembers what the man made him agree to at the start of their session. Failing to obey commands means Signor Graham will end their mentorship arrangement.

Bastard.

Reluctantly, Hannibal swallows his pride for now and stalks into the kitchen. It's a compact space, not big enough to really be called a room. There is a small countertop, a sink, and a mini fridge. The coffee set-up is in the corner, consisting of a kettle, a French press, and a bag of ground beans. Hannibal figures Signor Graham must really love coffee, so much that he has to have a coffee corner in the basement, removing the need to go upstairs every time.

What Hannibal also figures is that the man's taste in coffee is appalling, to put mildly. The beans aren't very fresh judging by the smell, and he doesn't recognize the brand as one of the luxury ones his aunt and uncle use. Even though Hannibal could get away with making himself a cup too, he is immediately put off by the idea, going for a glass of water instead. Putting such stale nastiness into one's body should count as a crime.

He doesn't put particular effort into making Signor Graham's coffee; the man doesn't deserve it right now. Hannibal searches the kitchenette for a spoon to add in the sugar, deliberating whether he feels petty enough not to bother stirring it in properly. *He definitely does*. He locates a spoon in a cutlery drawer, which is surprisingly well-stocked with multiple sets of spoons, forks, knives and even some cooking utensils, despite the lack of a stove or an oven.

Upon looking through the contents of the draw in more detail, Hannibal gets an idea.

He re-enters the main area a few minutes later, carrying a steaming mug of dirt-brown coffee, which without a doubt tastes just as sour as he feels. Signor Graham looks at him from where he was straightening the target board that was askew. The godforsaken knife that was the very cause of Hannibal's most recent defeat is still stuck in another board - he makes sure to check and double-check.

He hands Signor Graham his drink with a sullen nod. Though, it's a less genuine expression compared to the sincere ire he felt before having his important revelation in the kitchen.

The other man takes several big gulps of the coffee, visibly unbothered by the less than ideal taste. "Now, let's try again. I expect you to remember what you've learned."

And oh, this time, Hannibal sure as hell remembers.

This sparring round starts much like the previous ones, with Hannibal advancing on the other man quickly and without fear. If Signor Graham has more hidden blades or weapons, at least now Hannibal is prepared. Keeping track of his position in relation to the rest of the room, he begins steering the older man towards one of the few pieces of furniture in the practice room, the small table in the corner. It's perfect for what Hannibal has in mind.

He's getting better at blocking Signor Graham's hits and managing to deliver a light punch or two of his own. Every fighter has a pattern, a unique language in which their body moves, and as time goes on, Hannibal starts becoming fluent at reading it. A few minutes later, he pushes Signor Graham onto his back on the table, the wooden thing clattering from the impact. Before the man gets a chance to twist away, Hannibal stops him by pressing a knife to his throat.

'Use whatever you can get your hands on' is dangerous advice when one has access to a cutlery drawer. And the more Hannibal thinks about it, the more certain he becomes that Signor Graham sent him to the kitchen for that exact reason. The older man's pleased smile only proves that theory.

"Well done," he says, chest rising and falling from the spent effort.

He's bent over backwards across the small table, legs spread on either side of Hannibal's hips, and hand curled around Hannibal's wrist. Not trying to wrench the blade away, but simply holding his arm.

And despite still feeling angry, Hannibal can't ignore how stunning Signor Graham looks. Laid open and exposed, fully at Hannibal's mercy. He could kill the man right now. He *could*. But he won't.

Because he's won the round and now he can call Signor Graham by his first name.

"Thanks. *Will*," Hannibal replies, savouring the way the four-letter word rolls off his tongue. Short, sweet, and most importantly, well-deserved.

And Signor Graham - *Will* from now on and forever - flashes him a cheeky grin. As Hannibal pulls the knife away, having made his victory loud and clear, he's suddenly overwhelmed by the desire to kiss the man senseless.

"Technically, I helped you. So I don't know if your win counts," Will points out.

Hannibal swats at him half-heartedly with the hand that's still holding the weapon.

"That just means you were as eager to drop the formal titles as I was."

Will shrugs and sits up. "Can't argue with that."

Before rationality trumps his courage, Hannibal decides to find out what else Will can't argue with. He leans over and presses their lips together.

Will's mouth parts immediately and welcomes him in, and the next second, Hannibal finds himself on top of the other man, held there by Will's hand on his back. The kiss is heated, neither of them holding back now that they've started. Some part of Hannibal refuses to believe this is real, resorting to think he must've hit his head while sparring. But the way Will's insistent tongue explores his mouth, and the way Will's hands slide under Hannibal's shirt leave no room for misinterpretation. This is *very much real*, and Hannibal is *very much making out with his insanely attractive mentor*.

He ends the kiss to cast his eyes to the ceiling and take a deep breath, needing a moment to recompose himself. Not in order to pull back and resume their practice, but to dive further in. In the meantime, Will's mouth trails down to his neck, pressing hot kisses to Hannibal's jaw as he goes. Hannibal shivers, and a soft moan falls from his lips.

He's not new to fooling around with people like this, but has never been with anyone so much older. With so much more experience in these things. And that experience shows in Will's every move. There is none of that sloppy teenage fervour, haphazardly chasing pleasure in any way they can. The way Will handles Hannibal is focused and confident, knowing exactly what buttons to push to get them both going.

It doesn't take long for Hannibal to become achingly hard, instantly wishing he wasn't wearing his tight exercise pants right now. And at the rate things are progressing between them, he hopes he won't need his clothes soon anyway. Hannibal's hips grind against Will's crotch like they have a mind of their own, desperate for friction. The older man chuckles and grants him mercy in the form of slipping a hand into his pants. He doesn't bother removing any of the layers, instead going straight to Hannibal's cock and wrapping his fingers around it.

The sensation is already too much, drawing a shaky sigh from Hannibal. Part of him craves for the man to keep going with what he's started, but another part wants him to give Hannibal more than just his hand. Either way, he keeps rocking against the warm palm, voice growing high-pitched and needy:

"Please."

“Well, well. Looks like someone can’t concentrate on his training now,” Will reprimands him in a low and lustful tone. “Do we have… more *pressing matters* to attend to?”

His hand that’s between Hannibal’s legs gives a firm squeeze, causing Hannibal to let out a shamefully loud moan. Thank god the basement is soundproof.

“Yes… please,” he manages to get out, voice strained from the pent-up desire.

Will smiles against his neck and starts stroking him. What he probably intends to do is tease some more and dial things up a notch, but all of Hannibal’s senses are already so heightened and his need so potent that he feels his body seizing up in the most wonderful way. The next moment he’s coming all over Will’s hand.

Hannibal hears the other man mouth an almost inaudible ‘Oh’ at the realization, and mirth flickers in his eyes when their faces meet again. Hannibal’s cheeks flush, not so much from embarrassment as from the simple physiological relief, and he slumps on top of Will, burying his face into the crook of the man’s neck.

“Good boy. Well done,” Will murmurs, idly petting Hannibal’s sweaty hair.

If Hannibal’s limbs weren’t already as useless as jelly, he’d certainly melt at the praise. There is no going back for them now, if it was ever a possibility. Hannibal is undeniably, madly, and hopelessly crushing on his uncle’s right-hand man. There is something so inherently bad about this, which only makes it feel so inherently *good*.

When Hannibal reluctantly pulls himself up on his hands and knees, something brushes his thigh. He looks down to realize that Will is still hard.

“Let me- let me help you with that,” he rushes to say, hands immediately going to the zipper of the older man’s pants.

Will’s hands slither up like two snakes, coiling around Hannibal’s wrists and pulling them away.

“No.”

Hannibal stares at him, confused. Did he do something wrong?

“But… why?” he asks, uncertainty diluting his previously confident demeanour.

Will smirks, not maliciously so, and lets go of Hannibal’s wrist to cup his chin. “If you want the treat, you’re going to have to work for it.”

He gets to his feet in one smooth movement, straightening his shirt and wiping the damp hair off his forehead. To Hannibal’s disbelieving stare, he only says:

“The whole point of training will become obsolete if I give you all the rewards too soon.” He nods towards the sparring mats. “So, get back to work.”

Hannibal slowly follows suit, his blissed-out brain taking longer than usual to process what this means. He can only be sure of one thing. Will has got him hooked, for better or for worse. They both know that being the patient and persistent person that he is, Hannibal won't give up until he gets his reward.

This will be a long, long night.

Chapter End Notes

You all have no idea how glad I am not to have to type "signor graham" ever again HAHAHA 😂

End Notes

Feel free to check out my twitter, I'm always looking for fellow Fannibals to talk to!

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!